
SOCIALIST IDEAS IN ACTION

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Preface: Introducing socialism

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB AND DANA MILNE

SINCE THE LATE 1990S, more people have become open to anti-capitalist ideas. And that has happened alongside a huge rise in movements of protest and resistance: the Zapatistas in Mexico, the public sector strikes in France in late 1995, the Days of Action in Ontario, the global justice movement that shot to public visibility by shutting down the meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999, then marched in Quebec City in 2001 and continues to mobilize on a large scale outside North America, the international movement against the US-led war on Iraq in 2003, resistance against privatization of services in Ecuador, Argentina and Bolivia, and rising workers' struggles in Western Europe to name just a few.

Although these movements and struggles differ from each other in many ways, they have one important thing in common: they are protests against capitalism. Whether people think of themselves as opponents of neo-liberalism or the corporate agenda, as anti-globalization or supporters of global justice, what they are ultimately fighting against is capitalism, a profit-driven system that is racist, sexist, anti-democratic and ecologically-destructive.

This is hardly surprising, given what is happening in the world around us. As US and British forces occupy Iraq to secure its oil wealth for multinational corporations, employers in Canada are forcing workers to accept longer hours and less pay and governments of all political stripes are rewriting laws to make it easier for companies to make profits. Poverty and environmental destruction is increasing in developing countries at an unconscionable rate. It's not hard to see that the problem isn't just that some CEOs are greedy or that politicians are mean-spirited. The problem is an economic and political system that puts profits before people.

From the perspective of socialists, the rise in mass protests and global resistance to capitalism is one of the most hopeful developments of our time. But what is it

that we're all fighting for? What exactly is capitalism? Is there a better way of organizing society? How can we get there? How can we connect today's struggles with a different future than the one being laid down for us by the rich and powerful few who rule? These are vital questions, and the aim of this pamphlet is to give some clear answers – and to get people thinking about socialism again.

For many people, “socialism” is a word that brings up images of old white men railing on about the revolution or, even worse, the Communist dictatorships of the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe or China. It's as if socialists were written out of the pages of history, at least in North America. Few in the New Democratic Party (NDP) even use the word these days. But for the socialists who have written and published this pamphlet, socialism has nothing to do with the bureaucratic dictatorships that called themselves “Communist.” Our politics of socialism from below are radically different from those of people who used to look to the “Communist” states as a model. As you'll see, our socialism is also entirely different from what the NDP has ever stood for.

With this pamphlet, our aim as members of the New Socialist Group is to offer a clear introduction to the kind of socialism that we believe is relevant today. In the first section we outline some of the key concepts of socialism from below that shape the way socialists see the world. Then in the second section, we share some of the strategies and principles that we feel are essential in building successful mass movements. And finally, in the third section we look at the approach to how socialists should organize that's favoured by New Socialist Group.

To read more, visit www.newsocialist.org. Our website is frequently updated with news and analysis that explore anti-capitalist ideas, socialism from below, and current struggles among democratic, labour, environmental, feminist, queer and anti-racist movements.★

I. Capitalism, Class Struggle, Socialism

Introduction

BY HAROLD LAVENDER

WE LIVE IN THE very unjust global capitalist world. Why do inequalities and injustice persist? And what is the alternative? The articles in section 1 seek to address these pressing questions, providing a socialist analysis of capitalist society and a vision of how this society can be replaced with a far more democratic one based on workers' democracy, anti-racism and socialist feminism.

An important concept taken up in the first section is "exploitation". Exploitation is central to the way in which capitalist economies work. Under capitalism most people are compelled to sell their labour power on the market to an employer in order to survive. It is upon this relationship that capitalist profit is extracted from the labour of working people. Given that production in capitalist economies is based on the unplanned and competitive pursuit of profit, employers must constantly seek to raise profits by driving down labour costs and increasing labour productivity. This dynamic is a central feature of capitalist economies.

If capitalism requires exploitation, this means that it is a kind of system that depends on people being willing to accept injustices in their lives. It requires that people feel indifferent towards the suffering of others. It depends on bigotry, hatred and corruption. It represses people's abilities to work with and learn with others in mutually empowering, stimulating and enriching ways. Thus, capitalism reinforces and is reinforced by all ways of systematically having contempt for other people: sexism, racism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression. The struggle against capitalism is not enough if it is not a struggle against these forms of oppression.

Because of this exploitation and oppression, capitalism breeds conflict between workers and bosses, and between workers and the state (governments, the police, the courts). This conflict occurs both in workplaces and in communities (for example, when there are cuts to social services) and can involve, from below, strikes, occupations, street protests and popular uprisings, and, from above, lockouts, cuts to social programs and massive police mobilizations against dissent.

Only exploited and oppressed people themselves can be the agents of their liberation. But nothing in capitalist societies is completely immune from influence

by the conditions of exploitation and oppression. Indeed, many efforts to struggle against the system have become integrated into the functioning of the system itself. Since the 1940's, for instance, unions have become functionally integrated into capitalism by evolving into bureaucratic organizations run by professionally trained experts able to navigate through a complex legalistic system. Though unions remain sites for collective actions, union officials today will tend to block all but tightly controlled militancy.

Another barrier to workers' power is belief in the ideology, promoted by social democratic parties, that a humane capitalism is possible. This ideology is widespread. But as articles in this section explain, it flies in the faces of the ongoing global capitalist neo-liberal offensive and the logic of capitalism itself.

Luckily, it is not absolutely inevitable that members of trade unions and social democratic parties become servants of the capitalist system regardless of the historical and political circumstances. Rather, peoples' consciousness can deepen and shift in very progressive ways through their experience in struggle against injustices in their day-to-day lives under capitalism.

Thus, though reforms are vitally important, what is more important is how the struggle for them gives people a desire for the kind of real democracy that capitalism continuously represses: socialism from below, the democratic self-organization of the exploited and oppressed. Socialism from below is that kind of democracy that best allows people to address their material and political needs. It can only be won through collective struggle establishing democratic control over all society. This can begin in one country but can only be completed internationally.

Socialism from below is key to the New Socialist Group's long term vision and it distinguishes our politics from anti-democratic and elitist versions of socialism. It is a socialism that is revolutionary and democratic, committed to working-class self-emancipation, internationalism and opposition to all forms of oppression. It must reject bureaucratic and authoritarian notions of socialism and look instead to radical traditions which believe that liberation can only be achieved through the activity and mobilization of the oppressed themselves. ★

Capitalism

BY ELLEN WOOD

EVERY SOCIETY IS SHAPED by the way it organizes the production and allocation of life's basic necessities. Capitalism is a system in which virtually all goods and services are produced for and obtained from the market. Other societies have had markets, but only in capitalism is dependence on the market the fundamental condition of life. This unique way of organizing material life has had a relatively short history, emerging in the English countryside in the 16th or 17th century, though the word "capitalism" didn't appear till much later; and it reached its industrial maturity only in the 19th century.

In mature capitalism, the propertyless workers who supply goods and services live by selling their labour-power for a wage, while capitalists depend on the market to purchase labour-power and capital goods, and to sell what the workers produce. In non-capitalist societies, one class with superior power could directly appropriate the surplus labour of another-as, for instance, a feudal lord extracted labour services or rent from peasants. Capitalist profits are not extracted directly from workers. The relation between capital and labour is mediated by the market. Capitalists pay workers in advance, so to speak, and must realize their gains by selling what the workers produce. Profit depends on the difference between what the capitalist pays workers and what s/he derives from the sale of the products and services supplied by the workers.

Workers seem to be paid for all the work they do: eight hours pay, for instance, for eight hours work. This seems very different from situations in which peasants produce for their own consumption but are also forced to transfer surplus labour to landlords. There, the nature of the relationship is very clear, and it is fairly obvious that the landlord is exploiting the peasants who forfeit part of their labour to enrich him. In capitalism, it appears that just the opposite is taking place: the employer pays the worker, not the reverse. This is why it is easier for capitalists than for feudal lords to deny that they exploit workers.

But this appearance is misleading, because workers are paid for their labour power for a certain period of time, not for what they actually produce during that time. Whatever the workers produce belongs to the capitalist, and the capitalist appropriates the difference between what the workers are paid and what their products or services will fetch on the market. In that way, capitalists appropriate the surpluses produced by

workers in the form of profit, just as the landlord appropriates surpluses from peasants in the form of rent.

COMPETITION AND PROFIT-MAXIMIZATION

The fact that capitalists can make profit only if they succeed in selling their goods and services on the market, and selling them for more than the costs of producing them, means that making profit is uncertain. Capitalists must compete with other capitalists in the same market. Competition is, in fact, the driving force of capitalism-even if capitalists often do their best to avoid it, by means, for example of monopolies. But the social average of productivity that, in any given market, determines success in price competition is beyond the control of individual capitalists. They can't command the prices at which their products will successfully sell and don't even know in advance what conditions are necessary to guarantee a sale at all, let alone a profitable one.

The one thing capitalists can control to a significant extent is their costs. So, since their profits depend on a favourable cost/price ratio, they will do everything possible to cut their costs to ensure profit. This means, above all, cutting the costs of labour; and this requires constant improvements in labour productivity, to find the organizational and technical means of extracting as much surplus as possible from workers within a fixed period of time, at the lowest possible cost.

To keep this process going requires regular investment, the reinvestment of surpluses, and constant capital accumulation. This requirement is imposed on capitalists regardless of their own personal needs and wants. Even the most modest and socially responsible capitalist is subject to these pressures and is compelled to accumulate by maximizing profit, just to stay in business. The need to adopt "maximizing" strategies is a basic feature of the system and not just a function of greed-although it's certainly true that a system based on market principles will inevitably place a premium on wealth and encourage a culture of greed.

CRISIS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The need constantly to improve the productivity of labour has made capitalism exceptionally dynamic, generating constant improvements in technology and so-called economic growth. But the same market pressures that make it so dynamic also have contradictory effects. Capitalism is prone to constant fluctuations, not only

short-term “business cycles” but long-term downturn and stagnation. The very fact of competition means that, as new competitors enter the fray, while old ones are likely to stay put as long as they can in order not to lose their capital altogether, there are constant crises of over-capacity and overproduction. At the same time, the pressure to reduce the costs of labour can also reduce the demand for goods and services, which require that people, not least workers, have money in their pockets. Capital must constantly expand to find new markets and resources, yet in so doing, it is likely to create more competition. It needs other more or less successful economies to provide markets for its exports, and if, inevitably, it seeks to obstruct the development of potential competitors, it is likely also to suppress its own markets. These are just a few of the many contradictions that plague an economy in which everything depends on the market.

But there are even more deep-rooted problems in capitalism. Despite its dynamism, it is not a very efficient way of supplying human needs. It is certainly true that capitalism has generated great material and technological progress, but there is a huge disparity between the productive capacities engendered by capitalism and what it actually delivers. Production is determined not by what is needed but by what makes the most profit.

Everyone, for instance, needs decent housing, but good and affordable housing isn't profitable for private capital. There may be a huge demand for such housing, but it isn't what the economists call “effective demand”, the kind of demand with real money behind it. So capital is more likely to be invested in something like the production of computers, designed to be outdated as soon as they hit the market, so that people

who can afford it will buy new ones all the time—even while others remain homeless. Where production is skewed to the maximization of profit, a society (the US is the prime example) can have massive productive capacities, sufficient to feed, clothe, and house its whole population to a very high standard, and yet still have massive poverty, homelessness, and inadequate health care.

There are other consequences too, for instance:

The organization of work to maximize profit means that the work which occupies most of their energy and time is for many people sheer drudgery and not at all a fulfilling activity.

The quality, even the safety, of goods and services will often have to take second place to profit-maximization and the cutting of costs.

Capitalism, with its emphasis on profit-maximization and capital accumulation, is necessarily a wasteful and destructive system of production. It consumes vast amounts of resources, and it demands constant destruction to create new demand, with drastic effects on the environment.

All aspects of life that become market commodities are removed from the sphere of democratic accountability, answering not to the will of the people but to the demands of the markets and profit.

All these problems have certainly been aggravated by “globalization”, with an increasing disparity between rich and poor and an alarming rate of ecological degradation. But global capitalism does what it does not just because it is global but, above all, because it is capitalism and because, local or global, capitalism is driven by market imperatives.★

Class

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB

WHEN PEOPLE IN CANADA talk about class, they're usually thinking about groups of people of a certain level of wealth. So the rich are the “upper class,” most people are “middle class,” and the poor are the “lower class.”

Poverty is a terrible reality. A few households are unbelievably wealthy. But confusing wealth with class doesn't help people who want to change the world because it hides the tremendously important relationship that exists between the capitalist class – those who own or control workplaces and employ workers – and the majority who must work for them, the working class.

The working class – high-paid and low-paid – creates the enormous wealth of society, all its goods and services. To quote the labour song “Solidarity Forever,” “Without our brain and muscle not a single wheel would turn.” Part of the wealth we create is returned to us in the form of wages/salaries and benefits (the state takes some of it away through taxes). The rest goes to the capitalist class, who invest it in new tech-

nology, purchase the assets of other companies, buy huge houses for themselves, etc. This relationship between those who produce wealth and those who appropriate it is what Marxists refer to as *class exploitation*.

WHAT'S A CLASS?

A social class is a group of people identified by their position in the whole system of production of goods and services, defined above all by their relationship to workplaces, labour and other classes. This helps us to see how exploitation organizes people in social classes. Does someone own or control factories, offices, stores or other workplaces? That puts her in the tiny capitalist class. Small business owners, farmers and independent professionals, like lawyers and doctors, make up the middle class; some of them are rich, others struggle to get by.

People who work for wages/salaries and don't have real management power belong to the working class. In Canada, this is by far the largest class, and it includes people in many different kinds of jobs. Of course, just because people belong to the working class in this sense doesn't mean they think of themselves as workers or see their interests as different from those of the capitalist class (though many partially understand this).

At this point it's worth pointing out one common mistake sometimes made when thinking about the working class. We have often forgotten about people – mostly women – who aren't working for wages but instead are spending all their time doing housework, caring for children or looking after older relatives. These people must generally rely on the wages of other members of their households – usually men – or on welfare from the state. They need to be recognized as part of the working class, too.

UNAVOIDABLE CONFLICT

Conflicts between workers and employers and between workers and the state (governments, courts, the police, etc.) won't go away. To understand why, we need to recognize that the working class has all sorts of needs (and throughout our history, humans, unlike other animals, have created new needs). Under capitalism, we usually have to buy goods or services to meet our needs. We sometimes also have access to free public services.

Competition between capitalists forces them to try to increase their profits at the expense of workers. They hold down wages, make us work longer and/or harder, and do whatever else they think they can get away with to boost profits. They demand cuts to health care, education, welfare, EI and other services provided by the state. This puts new or stronger barriers in the way of working-class people meeting our needs.

Because these barriers exist, *class struggle* will always flare up. It happens even when workers desperately want to avoid conflict and don't see themselves as workers. It happens in the places where we work for pay, but also in the communities we live in. The most widely-experienced form of class struggle in Canada is the strike. Occupations, street protests, uprisings and other kinds of actions are also class struggle.

NOT THE ONLY STRUGGLE

Class struggle is not the only struggle in capitalist society. Working-class people are never only workers. Some are women, and experience sexism (which existed long before capitalism). Some face racism. Lesbians, gays and bisexuals are oppressed by heterosexism. Many people experience more than one kind of oppression at the same time. The fact that these various kinds of *oppression* exist, distinct from *class exploitation*, is very important. Oppression shapes the way class happens (and vice versa). For example, working-class women of colour are slotted into particular kinds of jobs, often the worst-paid and least secure.

Every form of oppression hurts those it affects, ravaging lives. Working-class people who belong to groups in society that are dominant (not oppressed) – such as white men – often act in ways that sustain oppression. In doing so, they reinforce divisions in the working class and undermine our ability to fight for our needs against employers and state power.

For this reason, oppressed people have to organize themselves to fight for equality and liberation. Such movements are crucial for fighting oppression. They are also needed to build unity in the working class, challenging other workers to fight oppression.

WORKERS' POWER

Divisions and inequality caused by oppression are one reason why the working class in Canada (and many other places) is so divided and badly organized. There are many other reasons why the enormous potential power of the working class doesn't often become a reality. Laws restrict the right to strike and split up unionized workers into narrow "bargaining units." The job of union officials is to negotiate the terms on which workers will be exploited, so they usually don't help workers mobilize. Parties that serve capitalist interests dominate political life. The NDP, the party of the bureaucratic leaders of unions and community groups in English Canada, rejects the idea that class struggle is unavoidable and has to be fought. The fact that there are few activists with a coherent analysis of capitalism and class struggle weakens the workers' movement.

But struggles against exploitation and oppression will go on as long as capitalism exists. In these struggles there is the potential for people to organize themselves

and unleash the power of the working class to transform society (the task of socialists like the ones who publish this magazine is to help this happen). The source of workers' power is not just our numbers, but our LABOUR. It's the life-blood of society. When mil-

lions of us withdraw our labour in mass strikes organized democratically by workers ourselves, we pose truly revolutionary questions: which class will run society? How should society be run? ★

Socialism and Native Americans

BY PETER KULCHYSKI

SO, LET'S START with some basics. Have you ever read the text of any one of the treaties made in Canada with First Nations? Do you know anything about the first attempt to form a national political organization for Indians in Canada? Can you name any of the reasons why First Nations so vehemently opposed the First Nations Governance Act? The high odds you didn't do well on my snap quiz means that the sanctioned ignorance of how colonialism has operated within Canada has left its mark on the political left almost as much as it has on the political right. In the same way that our schools won't tell us much about the labour strikes that helped build the welfare state, or the racism that our immigration policy was steeped in, it hasn't had much to say about Aboriginal peoples in this country. Apart, that is, from a few lessons to titillate cultural curiosity.

While socialists in Canada have been strong supporters in solidarity struggles for social justice around the world, they have a less inspiring record when it comes to dealing with indigenous struggles in their own backyard. Demonstrations against international colonialism, from the protests of recent events in Iraq to earlier mobilizations around South Africa, El Salvador, East Timor, seem to attract hundreds and sometimes thousands of dedicated activists. Colonialism in Canada's own far north and mid-north continue to draw a tepid response: a well publicized show of support last March in Toronto for the logging blockade at Grassy Narrows drew a handful of supporters from outside the Aboriginal community. The problem is not simply with activists. In my view it signals a failure of socialist theory in Canada to come to grips with the particularity of oppression here. It's a pity because the left and Aboriginal people in Canada have a lot to say to each other, if they could really start talking.

It is often and easily forgotten, a key part of the sanctioned ignorance, that Aboriginal people's labour ironically enough provided the fundamental productive value that established Canada as an economically viable

economy. Aboriginal women and men were primary producers of fur for the first 300 years of colonization in Canada. This work did not constitute Aboriginal people as a working class: whatever their position may have been they were clearly not wage workers forced to sell their labour power on an open market. They retained access to their own subsistence (the "means of production" in Marx's terms) and retained through the whole period a strong sense of distinctiveness, grounded materially in a hunting economy.

MARGINALIZATION

As the fur trade waned in centrality to the settler colony in the last half of the nineteenth century, Aboriginal peoples were marginalized and processes of dispossession were deployed to immiserate them and to force them into the position of wage workers. Marx recognized the centrality of such processes, arguing forcefully in *Capital* that the dissolution of the bonds between working people and their land was a central moment in the history of capitalism. However, such dissolutions did not take place in a vacuum: they were hotly contested in the old world as in the new. In the new, Aboriginal leaders successfully deployed an array of tactics, ultimately codified in a doctrine of Aboriginal rights, to maintain a degree of access to the means of subsistence. While relations between Aboriginal peoples and newcomers for three hundred years were primarily economic, organized around the dynamic of the fur industry, at the end of the nineteenth century a new logic began to prevail: relations came to be organized around politics. The Canadian State became the key hegemonic institution in the lives of Aboriginal peoples, as it remains to this day.

Aboriginal people were therefore never a significant part of the working class in Canada. Here and there, in this or that historical moment during the last hundred odd years, Aboriginal people's labour-power was exploited and they fought back using the tools of working people. In large measure, particularly until Indian Act revisions in 1951 lead to out-migration from reserves,

Aboriginal communities in the mid and far north stayed apart from the dramatic series of capital and labour confrontations that helped shaped critical aspects of Canadian history. Instead, they represented another track, no less critical to capital development in Canada and in my view no less critical to Canadian history. Aboriginal people maintained some degree of access to and in some cases title to the land base that Canadian capital salivated over. As a resource exporting nation the land base was central to the wealthy. Clearing access to it has been one of the defining tasks of the Canadian State.

NATIVES AND CLASS

Attempts on the part of the Canadian left to neatly fit Aboriginal peoples into the working class have not served to illuminate any dimension of Aboriginal people's struggles and not given socialist practice a strong base from which to support those struggles. In many cases, the direct implication of this kind of class analysis is that Aboriginal peoples should give up their attempts to maintain a subsistence economy, support whatever mining or pipeline or clearcutting projects that are proposed for their land, and join with other workers in carving out as good a deal as is possible for themselves as workers. And this means, materially, they should disadvantage themselves in the struggle against capital by surrendering the ground their ancestors fought to give them as a basis for maintaining a distinctive social identity and a distinctive way of life.

Radical theory does not have to fall into this trap. Marx himself offered a rich variety of concepts much more directly related to Aboriginal people's struggles. These offer socialists a strong position from which to articulate support for the particular struggles of Aboriginal peoples. While I cannot in this brief space flesh these out, a few words will act as pointers. Most importantly, Marx elaborated a notion of understanding and classifying kinds of societies through the idea of the "mode of production" as a defining feature. This allows us to recognize that while a vibrant cultural diversity exists in Aboriginal Canada, underlying this cultural diversity is a political-economic similarity: Aboriginal peoples belong to a hunting mode of production. Hunting peoples create and affirm social relations, political structures and values that are antithetical to capitalism.

Conflicts between contemporary capitalism and Aboriginal peoples need to be thought in terms of the developing dominance of the former mode of production over the latter and in terms of the latter's resistance. Marx also, especially in his understanding of the commodity and capital accumulation, understood how capitalism was a totalizing dynamic: it has to expand and absorb, ultimately erasing anything that acts as an

obstacle to its rule. The "developing dominance" I referred to can also be called totalization: for Aboriginal peoples a benign liberal democracy (as Canada presents itself) is experienced as a totalitarian machinery devoted to the ruthless eradication of their life ways. In his view of "primitive communism", guided by his reading of the anthropology of his time, Marx articulated a notion that "early" forms of society could contain quite advanced social relations. It's also interesting to note that in his early years Marx wrote about the "customary rights" of working people in much the same fashion that today we understand Aboriginal rights. Marx himself provides a much better place to begin an analysis of Aboriginal politics in Canada than many of the marxists who have followed in his wake.

Where does this leave activists? If new socialists do not want to repeat the mistakes of too many of their ossified ancestors they will have to engage in some re-thinking. Although they were not a working class in the nineteenth century, it is striking that in the production of belts made of buffalo hide that ran industrial machinery or whale oil that lubricated the same machinery, Aboriginal people's labour and resources were near the core of the early accumulation of capital. Today the North American energy sector, in particular, which plays a key role in capitalist geopolitics and in the global economy in general, is looking northwards for oil, natural gas, hydro electricity.

Aboriginal lands are again a critical stumbling ground in the drive to capital accumulation. And Aboriginal life ways can be thought of, not as sentimental holdovers of an outdated premodernism, but as the advance guard for the values we will all have to come to appreciate as human beings if we are to imagine a sustainable future; values, coincidentally, that line up far better with socialist ideals than many a more commonly referred to example of "real world" socialism.

So pay attention to the mighty Deh Cho and the Mackenzie Valley pipeline project. Pay attention to the road that will push its way up the eastern side of Lake Winnipeg. Pay attention to the hydro corridor that will bring ever more power to Toronto. Pay attention to the grand flooding that will take place in northern Quebec. And the diamond mines in the NWT. And the nickel mines in Labrador. And the clearcutting in B.C., in Manitoba, in Ontario. Will this be the next few decades of Canadian history? Are Aboriginal people involved in this history? Are you sitting on the sidelines? You don't have to be. Read some history. The treaties are a good place to start. Read some anthropology. Here and there, midst all the kinship confusion, you can find some real inspiration. Read some literature. There are some Aboriginal novelists and poets who have more than a little to say about all this.

The notion of the nation, a continuing vexation for socialists, can be thought of in this light. The “First Nations” clearly involve some kind of project to consolidate a national identity that enacts these life ways and values. Such a project is always destabilizing for the broader project of nationalism in Canada. Just as the Cree Nation on the east side of Hudsons Bay in their existence challenge a Quebecois national project, so the Dene Nation and the Mohawk Nation throw into question the Canadian project. The Canada that is a site for carefully orchestrated capital accumulation through “peace, order and good government” is antithetical to the democratic aspirations circulating in another country that exists within: I call it “bush country.”

FIRST NATION DEMOCRACY

I was recently in Lac Brochet, a Dene community in the northwest corner of Manitoba. They are in “receiv-ership,” officially seen by Indian Affairs as one of the most mismanaged communities in Canada. In the week I was there, among many other meetings and gatherings, a community assembly was held. A strong proportion of the people came out. Leaders were criticized, publicly. Decisions were made. This was a normal event in Lac Brochet, barely worth a passing comment to my friends who live there.

Something called democracy, the vague ghost of which barely survives in the marks some citizens make every few years, was performed before my eyes, not for my eyes but for itself. It is this, precisely this, that the Canadian State relentlessly works to stamp out. Hence,

the First Nations Governance Act: give them as much bureaucracy as the rest of us suffer with. Call that Democracy. Accountability. Transparency. The new holy trinity of capitalist politics, which capitalist politicians of course feel no need to abide by, and capitalists themselves reject as notions that have anything to do with how business is run. Do new socialists have anything to say about this colonial struggle?

New socialists will appreciate that what is going on in Grassy Narrows today is not some quaint environmental struggle that they can add to their growing list of worthy causes to be fit into the schedule where possible, another addition to the long list in an ever extending rainbow coalition of “bigger tent” leftism. New socialists are in a position to understand which Aboriginal projects, for all their new age sensitivity, are engaged with fundamental collusion with capital and which, for all their inarticulate rage, are engaged in a fundamental collision with capital. There are more Aboriginal people in the cities than ever before. These people often cling fervently to their Aboriginal identity, though their struggles are the struggles of poor people of colour and they can be identified as a segment of the working class. But numbers are not everything. The call of a very small part of the Canadian population, living in remote northern communities practicing and embodying values that we can only dream of, is a call that must not be ignored by new socialists or we will not deserve the name we give ourselves. ★

Capitalism and oppression: Making the links

BY DAVID McNALLY

ONE OF THE MOST debilitating debates on the Left over the past 15 years or so has revolved around the relationship between identity-based struggles and class struggles. At one extreme have been the class “fundamentalists” for whom all struggles not directly organized around class are of secondary importance. At the other end of the spectrum, people immersed in “identity politics” have generally dismissed class politics as foreign to their concerns with specific issues of oppression based on gender, race, and sexuality in particular. The result has been an often bitter contest between two positions neither of which offers a meaningful perspective for linking anti-capitalist and anti-oppression politics. How then did

the Left get caught up in this debate? And how might we move beyond both of these one-sided positions?

Several factors account for the identity versus class debate on the Left, three of which deserve special emphasis. First, the earliest working class movements tended to express the experiences of those who created the first labour and socialist organizations. Since the members of these movements were predominantly working men in Europe and North America, these organizations tended to reflect their experiences of the world. As important as the achievements of these movements were – in building unions, winning the right to strike, and popularizing the ideas of socialism – the more marginalized experiences of working class women, non-European workers, and non-white work-

ers rarely found a place in these movements, their programs and their demands. As a result, many early labour and socialist movements reproduced the very exclusions of women and workers of colour that characterized the society as a whole.

A second factor was the development of rigid, bureaucratic organizations on the Left, often dominated by elite groups of trade union officials and parliamentary representatives. These groups acquired a unique set of privileges and a degree of acceptance into places of power that made them hostile to radical demands coming from feminists, immigrant workers and others. Privileged bureaucrats of the Left often feared that association with those less socially “respectable” than skilled, white, male workers would result in their being ostracized and pushed out of the corridors of power.

In the Europe of the early 20th century, for instance, the leaders of many of the mainstream parties of the parliamentary left supported colonialism, arguing, much to their disgrace, that European domination would “civilize” people of the colonial world. Similarly, these parties tended to reproduce patterns of male domination that characterized the capitalist society around them.

When we look at most trade unions and bureaucratic parties of the Left these days, then, we see groups which have often marginalized, and sometimes denigrated radical struggles by anti-racists, feminists, lesbian and gay liberationists and others.

There is, of course, a third factor in the equation: the ability of capitalism to channel identity-based struggles into a liberal politics of civil rights, one in which the legal entitlements of a specific marginalized group are advanced without a broader challenge to the very structures of capitalist society which breed oppression and exploitation. One result of this tactic is that a small elite from oppressed groups is often elevated to privileged positions as consultants and advisors on “race relations,” “equity” and “multiculturalism” while the majority of people in their communities continue to suffer the same oppressions. In the United States, for instance, a few thousand black politicians have been elected to political office since the struggles of the 1960s, yet more African-Americans today live below the poverty line than was the case 40 years ago. The failure of identity politics to address capitalism and class often produces a liberal approach that the system can easily accommodate. Indeed, capital has often proved itself quite adept at pitting one identity group against another – yet more evidence as to why we need a generalized politics of opposition to the system as a whole.

Fortunately, we have some important resources for working our way out of the unhappy polarization be-

tween a “class politics” that fails to advance an anti-oppression perspective on issues like sexuality, gender and race, on the one side, and a narrow “identity politics” on the other that refuses to address the class relations of capitalism and the exploitation of labour which sustains it.

To begin with, the radical and revolutionary socialist tradition (as opposed to the bureaucratic one) has seen some important attempts to shape a theory and practice that truly connects anti-capitalism and anti-oppression issues.

The writings of Marx and Engels against British colonialism in Ireland are invaluable in this regard, as are the first Marxist efforts to theorize the oppression of women – Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, August Bebel’s *Woman under Socialism*, and major works by the German Marxist Clara Zetkin and the Russian Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai.

On issues of sexuality, the German socialist and communist movements between 1910 and 1935 waged some impressive mass campaigns against criminalization of homosexuality, in defence of abortion, and for sexual rights for youth. Some of the most important work in this area involved the Sexual-Politics (or Sex-Pol) movement often associated with the Marxist psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich. The Gay Left of the 1970s took much of this work many steps further, as Rosemary Hennessy has recently pointed out in her book *Profit and Pleasure*.

Marxist analyses of racism and imperialism have also had a long, if sometimes tortured, history on the Left. Particularly noteworthy are the writings of W. E. B. Dubois on racial oppression in the US, the work of Communists in Harlem and Alabama in the 1930s and ‘40s, the theory and practice of the brilliant Trinidadian Marxist C. L. R. James, the profound dissections of racism and colonialism by Frantz Fanon, author of *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Angela Davis’ classic text *Women, Race and Class*.

This is not to suggest that these works are without imperfections or that they all fit together seamlessly. But radical socialists should not be looking for a dogma. We ought instead to seek out the resources of past struggles in order to build a better anti-capitalist movement today – and the theory and practice described above is rich in resources to that end. However, timid and bureaucratic movements of the Left have usually buried these radical traditions. One of the duties of those who practice the politics of socialism from below is to recover these traditions, extend them, modify them where necessary, and build upon them.

Fortunately, there are some very real prospects for doing this today. The re-emergence of anti-capitalism as a growing current within the global justice move-

ment means that for the first time in many decades it may be possible to create a radical movement that is not dominated by union and parliamentary officials. If we can make anti-oppression issues central to our anti-capitalism from the start, it will be much more difficult for more conservative elements to marginalize these issues later.

One of the ways socialism-from-below activists can help in this regard is by clearly advancing an anti-racist, feminist class politics. This perspective begins from an understanding that class relations in any society are always gendered, racialized and organized in terms of systems of sexual regulation. There are no class relations which are not intimately bound up with systems of racial, sexual and gender domination. The development of an effective anti-capitalist class politics, therefore, can only take place on the basis of directly addressing the issues of racial, sexual and gender oppression that scar the lives of huge numbers of working class people.

In addition, since socialism from below has an internationalist outlook, this means recognizing that the

world working class is predominantly non-white. Workers of colour are the majority globally – and this is increasingly true in major North American cities such as Toronto, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. Not surprisingly, some of the most dynamic working class organizations in North America in recent years have been those – like the Justice for Janitors movement and the Bus Riders’ Union in LA – that have creatively woven together anti-racist, feminist and working class demands.

It is this kind of politics, reconnected to the best anti-oppression theory and practice in the Marxist tradition, that offers a meaningful way beyond the stale debate that has too often stymied the Left.

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State power

BY DAVID CAMFIELD

ROLLING BACK THE STATE – “getting government off our backs” – is a big theme in mainstream politics today. All the major political parties endorse this idea to some degree. The hard right-wing Canadian Alliance is its loudest booster on the federal level, but the Liberal record in office is hard to miss. The NDP has accepted much of the same agenda.

Eliminating many regulations on business activity, selling off publically-provided services to private companies, and reorganizing the underfunded remainder of the public sector along the lines of the profit-driven private sector are central planks of the market-driven politics often called neo-liberalism. This has terrible costs for people and the environment around the world. The deaths caused by e coli-infected drinking water in Walkerton, Ont. are just one tragic example.

People who oppose privatization and deregulation find ourselves in a running battle against the “less government is good government” agenda of neo-liberalism. We constantly have to challenge support for regressive tax cuts and balanced budget legislation. Such measures are cleverly presented by right-wing politicians and commentators as “relief” for hard-

pressed working-class people. In reality, they entrench the agenda that either privatizes the public services working people rely on or makes them more like private businesses (corporatization).

When we fight this agenda, what are we really doing? We’re defending limits on capitalist markets, for which profit-making is all that matters. Labour and community activists are absolutely right to refuse to accept the “market is best” orthodoxy. In fact, we should do more than defend existing restrictions on profit-making. We should demand stronger state limits: for example, higher minimum wages, shorter work weeks, better funding for new and existing public services, the elimination of user fees and the nationalization of banks and other corporations without compensation for their owners.

However, most people think of the fight against privatization, corporatization and deregulation not as fundamentally against capitalist markets but as a defence of the state. Existing state institutions are often held up as inherently good by people on the Left. They are praised as wonderfully compassionate and democratic. Sometimes they are even said to define “the Canadian identity” – although the most popular public

social programme, federal medicare, is only several decades old!

WHAT'S IN A STATE?

What's wrong with this way of understanding the state? For one thing, it's based on a very narrow idea of what states are. There's a lot more to states than social programmes. There are a whole host of state laws and regulations, most of which support the rule of the powerful. Property laws defend the private wealth concentrated in the hands of a tiny ruling class. Labour law enshrines the authority of bosses and strictly limits when workers can legally strike. Citizenship laws grant some people certain rights and deny them to others. Laws like Ontario's "Safe Streets Act" make poor people into criminals. Laws give special rights to heterosexual couples recognized as married by the state, and prohibit some people's sexual activity. The Canadian constitution and the federal "Clarity" Act deny the First Nations and Quebec the right to determine their own future as nations.

To make sure people obey their laws, states have enormous powers of violence and surveillance at their disposal: the police, military, courts, prisons and security services. It is oppressed and exploited people who bear the brunt of state violence and repression. Homeless people know this truth all too well. So do people who take part in picket lines or demonstrations that are actually affecting an employer, top state official or government.

The official idea taught in schools and proclaimed in the media is that elected governments are the most important part of the state, which other departments and agencies serve. The leaders of the NDP, unions and many social justice groups believe this. In reality, all sorts of state activities continue unchanged when a new government takes office and are rarely affected by elected politicians. Top government bureaucrats, judges, police chiefs, security officials and military officers are very powerful but never elected. Their ultimate loyalty is to the state and the social order it upholds, not the government of the day.

So states are much more than public service providers. Even here, the "common-sense" left-wing view is flawed. State-provided services may meet certain needs, but the ways they are organized to do so have many problems. They are not designed or run in the interests of the people who use them or those who work delivering them. Students have little or no say about what goes on in schools, colleges and universities. Nor do patients in hospitals. Welfare and EI force people back into the labour market to take whatever jobs employers are offering, rather than give those without jobs a decent standard of living.

STATES AND CAPITALISM

To make sense of the many things that the "markets bad, states good" ideology of most of the Left doesn't, we need a different way of understanding states. States aren't neutral institutions serving the "public interest." They are organized to use laws and regulations, backed by armed might, to administer societies in which goods and services are produced for profit by a class that employs people who work for wages. In short, they are capitalist states. Capitalists are preoccupied with the interests of their own companies, and are neither willing nor able to take on the state's key tasks. Employers have capitalist economic power, modern states wield capitalist political power. This is equally true in a parliamentary democracy as in a dictatorship.

The history of the Canadian state supports this analysis. This state power developed as part of the rule of the dominant class in a society of colonial settlers expanding westwards across the North American territory subject to Britain. It violently put down aboriginal resistance and allowed capitalist agriculture, commerce and manufacturing to thrive in a market protected from the US. It has sought out the immigrant labour demanded by employers. When workers' struggles have erupted, most dramatically in 1919, and when the Quebecois and First Nations have challenged their oppression, the state has moved to contain them with force and demobilize them with concessions. It has regulated sexuality in various ways, including laws banning or restricting abortion, birth control and sex between people of the same gender.

AGAINST THE STATE

This kind of state will always be a barrier to the struggles against the exploitation of workers by capitalists, sexism, racism, heterosexism and national oppression. While state limits on the power of markets must be defended and expanded, winning these and other reforms from states doesn't change their basic organization. Nor does electing left-wing governments. State power is a crucial part of how capital rules.

For this reason, the struggle against capitalism must also be a struggle against state power. Movements of workers and oppressed peoples need to be as self-organized and independent from the state as possible. Ultimately, capitalism can only be uprooted by a revolution in which working people replace the capitalist state with new, radically democratic, institutions of self-government (such as councils of recallable delegates in workplaces and communities) that emerge from mass struggles. These forms of socialist democracy, a "semi-state" – not a state seized by an elite that will only become a new class of exploiters – point the way to a society without classes or states: socialism.★

Patriarchy

BY SUSAN FERGUSON

PATRIARCHY. WHAT IS IT? Why do feminists insist on using this concept? How does it relate to the socialist project?

Strictly speaking, patriarchy means “rule of the paters” (fathers). This doesn’t really refer to your dad’s right to impose a curfew or to excuse himself from the dishes – though it does have something to do with it. It refers, rather, to a broad set of social relations of a much earlier era characterized by what’s called “household production.” That is, in early kinship-based economies, the production of food and goods was organized through individual households (which usually included members of what we call today the “extended family,” as well as slaves). The pater, by virtue of his position within the household, owned and controlled both the wealth (what was produced) and the labour. Women, but also some men – male children, slaves and even son-in-laws and unmarried brothers – were subject to the wishes of the paters.

But the term patriarchy carries a much looser interpretation as well. In its most general sense, patriarchy is simply another way of saying sexism. Feminists often use it as shorthand for “the domination of women by men.” For the current of feminism known as “radical feminism”, patriarchy is a system in which male power is attributed to biological attributes, namely men’s physical strength and their supposedly innate sexual aggression.

But the most compelling definition of patriarchy is also the one that is compatible with socialist politics. Here, patriarchy refers to a social (as opposed to natural) system of male domination. That is, patriarchy is a set of practices and institutions that effectively reproduce women’s oppression daily and generationally.

Before explaining that mouthful, a note on the relevance of the “strict” definition of patriarchy is in order. Capitalism is a far cry from a kinship system of household production. In capitalism, production is radically separated from the household or “private sphere.” Unlike past societies, where the household was also the work unit, today most of us leave home to go to work. For the vast majority of people, work and home are separate. Yet, by referring to an earlier era in which the household figured centrally as the locus of social power, the term patriarchy reminds us that household and family relations still deeply affect our lives in capitalist society. This highlights the very personal way in which women tend to experience oppression. And

while it is certainly unwise to reduce women’s oppression to that sphere, there is something about women’s unique capacity to bear children that seems to be intimately bound to our denigrated status and oppression. While things like low wages and the historical denial of our right to vote are examples of “impersonal” oppression, male domination also has an intensely personal aspect, experienced as something that individual men do to individual women. This is evident in the extreme in wife beating and rape, but also in your father’s, brother’s, husband’s or boyfriend’s assumption that he needn’t do the dishes.

Patriarchy’s nod to history is useful. It reminds us that women’s oppression is not simply a feature of modern capitalist society, and that its shape and character is changeable. Although there is evidence to suggest women enjoyed social power and prestige equal to men in some early foraging societies, as soon as the shift from communal to unequal control of wealth developed, and society divided into classes, women’s oppression was born. The term patriarchy acknowledges this broad historical sweep. This was especially important when, during the emergence of the modern women’s movement, many on the socialist left denied that women’s oppression predated capitalism.

But the idea of patriarchy remains important today, if only because it helps clarify what sexism is – and what it is not. Sexism is not just a set of “wrong ideas” that anti-sexist education can put right. Nor is it a system of power that, as many radical feminists would say, exists independently of capitalist (or any other type of) class relations. Rather, it has its own structures of power (a key one being the family), and forms of oppression (from personal intimidation to unfair hiring to social assistance policies) that are intimately linked to class power, though not reducible to class.

Each form of class-divided society takes up key institutions and practices of patriarchal power and transforms them to suit its particular requirements. So, for instance, the family under capitalism can be a much less rigid, formal institution able to accommodate single parents, gay and lesbian marriage, households without children and women can still perform the lion’s share of child-rearing and housework. The labour market can make room for a small number of women to become top executives and even owners of companies and still ensure that women – and especially women of colour – are disproportionately lumped in the lowest-paying,

least secure jobs. Women can (sometimes) walk about wearing short shorts and bearing their midriffs without sexist stares and comments, and rape and sexual harassment can still remain serious and common crimes. The explanation for such contradictions lies in the historical development of a patriarchal capitalism.

The term patriarchal capitalism refers to the way in which the oppression of women has been incorporated into the workings of modern capitalism. In particular, this involves the fundamental responsibility society as-

signs to women for the rearing and nurturing of the next generation of workers. But it also entails lack of control over sexuality and reproduction; lower wages and less secure employment; sexist ideologies and practices that treat women as socially inferior; and so on.

For all these reasons, a mass movement to eradicate sexism and patriarchy must be a central feature of the struggle for a world free from all forms of oppression.★

Socialist feminism

BY SUSAN FERGUSON

WHEREVER THERE HAVE BEEN socialists, there have been socialist feminists. Even in the early 1800s, pre-Marxian "utopian" socialists in Britain and France insisted women's emancipation was integral to their vision of a communal, just society. But the modern roots of socialist feminism emerged 40 years ago as a leading current within Second Wave Feminism. At that time, young radicals were grappling with the questions posed, on the one hand, by the political terrain of post-World War Two America (Jim Crow laws, the Vietnam War and sexist policies and attitudes) and, on the other, by some practices and structures of old-style, bureaucratic left groups.

People like Kate Millet (*Women and Revolution*), Sheila Rowbotham (*Women, Resistance and Revolution*) and Juliet Mitchell (*Women's Estate*) pointed out the limits of liberal feminism, which understood emancipation in terms of women gaining greater access to, and fuller representation within, the state and business. They argued sexism was not just about men's greater opportunities in these areas, and it wouldn't end simply by legislative fiat. Rather, they saw relations between the sexes as socially determined – that is, embedded in and shaped by the dynamics and institutions of capitalist society.

While real differences divided these and other socialist feminists, a common anti-capitalist thread wove its way through their writings and activism. It was the late 1960s, and the Canadian government had just legalized the pill and other birth control devices. More and more married women were seeking out paid work. Socialist feminists – many of whom had honed their organizing skills in the New Left defending Quebec nationalism and Natives' right to self-determination, and protesting against the Vietnam war, turned to other more domestic issues. Childcare was one: loud demon-

strations and sit-ins led to the creation of co-operative centres in various cities; strike support actions boosted childcare workers' morale and wages. Abortion was another hot issue. Across the country, socialist feminists fought for a woman's right to control her body. In April, 1970, the Vancouver Women's Caucus launched a caravan that traveled to Ottawa. The protesters carried signs bearing slogans such as "This Uterus Does Not Belong to the State" and a coffin symbolizing all the women who had died from illegal abortions. Socialist feminists were also active in Consciousness Raising groups, some of which spawned Working Women's Associations that provided strike support and organized around workplace issues. At the first national conference of the women's movement in November 1970, in which more than 200 women participated, socialist-feminist ideas were hotly debated.

Socialist feminism's fundamental innovation to the understanding of women's oppression has to do with the family. It's proponents argued that there's nothing natural about the family; instead it's a socially constructed institution central to the running of the capitalist economy. The economic significance of the single-household family was more self-evident in the pre-industrial period, when the production of goods and food largely occurred in or near households (as craft and agricultural production dominated the economy). With industrialization came factories and offices, and work was separated from home and family life; as a result, women's domestic work became, in Bonnie Fox's words, "hidden in the household." What's more, responsibility for childcare and housework prevented women from participating as full and equal members of both the paid workforce and civil society, thereby ensuring their lack of political voice and super-exploitation in low-paying jobs with little security.

THE DOMESTIC LABOUR DEBATE

Those insights developed out of an important early discussion called the domestic labour debate. Through a series of articles published in left journals, the DLD examined the ways in which women's unpaid work contributes to the maintenance and promotion of capitalism's ability to wrench a profit from its paid labour force. Contributors (such as Margaret Benston, Peggy Morton and Maria Della Costa) attempted to apply the categories of Marxist political economy to the "female" activities of wiping snotty noses, ironing shirts and frying eggs. The debate centred around whether or not domestic labour constituted its own "mode of production" based on the production of "use values" (goods for consumption rather than sale) or whether it constituted "value-producing" activities (that is, by shopping, feeding, and clothing this and the next generation of workers, women were directly producing a profit for the capitalist class). The debate was never definitively resolved but its participants made a strong case for the essential links between household and wage labour.

The DLD, however, never clearly answered why it was women in particular who shouldered the burden of housework and childcare. This failure fueled a growing skepticism about the usefulness of Marxism to feminism – a skepticism best voiced by Heidi Hartmann in a 1979 article, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism." Hartmann argued that society can be understood in terms of two distinct, though related, sets of relations. One, the economic relationship of capital and labour is, as theorized by Marx, based upon the exploitative process of surplus extraction, and will only end with a working-class uprising. The other, the interpersonal relationship of men and women, is subject to the logic of patriarchal oppression, which can only be defeated by women fighting together "as a class." Hartmann's "dual systems theory" set, for a long time to come, the terms of discussions and debates. Activists swayed by Hartmann's critique became even less trusting of the Marxist left (which had already lost credibility with many for frequently treating women's liberation as secondary to the "real, more fundamental" struggles occurring at the point of production). As a result, many socialist feminists shifted toward women-only, anti-patriarchy groups, while others dropping out of the struggle completely.

A CULTURAL SHIFT

Michele Barrett's 1980 book, *Women's Oppression Today*, reaffirmed that dualist framework from a somewhat different angle. Barrett emphasized the ideological potency of patriarchy, arguing that patriarchy, as a powerful set of pre-capitalist ideas, withstood the tendencies within capitalism to treat all people (black or

white, man or woman) equally, as potential wage-labourers ripe for exploitation. Her understanding of oppression in ideological terms captured the imagination of a number of socialist feminists as a healthy corrective to the narrowly economic domestic labour debate positions.

But Barrett's socialist feminism drew on and fed into post-structuralist theories which construe the realm of ideas as operating independently from social reality – that is, as having a life of their own, only coincidentally linked to the material constraints and opportunities in people's everyday lives. From here, it was a short step to the even more radically idealist vision of society, postmodernism, which sees social reality as constructed by "discourse" (language and other cultural representations).

Also throughout this period, women of colour raised pointed objections to feminist organizing as a whole, including that done by socialist feminists. One early group to do so was the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black lesbian feminists organized in the mid-1970s. They and others argued that in suggesting class and patriarchy are the two fundamental engines driving social change, socialist feminists neglect important non-class divisions (racism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.) amongst women. For many feminists (bell hooks being one of the more influential), post-Marxist theories of ideology and discourse offered a compelling understanding these complexities. At the same time, Thatcher, Reagan and their New Right ideology was taking hold, deflating and defeating many left activists. Notions of class and class struggle soon seemed like quaint relics of another era.

AND NOW?

By the mid-1980s, socialist feminism had lost its momentum as a vibrant current of thought in the universities. Outside the academy, however, the situation was somewhat less bleak. Socialist feminists continued to be active in local campaigns such as abortion rights, childcare and women's shelters. In the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, for instance, they mounted militant defences of women entering clinics who were being harassed by the religious right and argued for accessible abortion services. Meanwhile, groups like Toronto Socialist Feminist Action struggled to develop more inclusive activist strategies that could address racism, heterosexism and so on. Individual socialist feminists have been doing valuable work within unions and social service agencies for years now, and they've contributed to fights to keep shelters open, for immigrant rights, a living wage and have played a part in the anti-globalization movement. But today, there is nothing like the cohesive socialist feminist movement of the sort that existed in the 1960s and 1970s.

In fact, it's unlikely one will arise in the near future – at least one that resembles the last one. That's because socialist feminists today are more committed than ever to developing a broader, more inclusive, approach to understanding social power and struggling for justice. While dual systems theory floundered in the 1980s, a number of academics and activists continued to elaborate on an alternative socialist feminist theory. People like Johanna Brenner, Nancy Holmstrom, Meg Luxton, Pat Armstrong and Wally Seccombe suggested that, rather than two semi-autonomous, intersecting systems, oppression and exploitation are integrally linked in a single – though multi-faceted – system of social reproduction that is neither purely economic nor purely cultural or ideological. Historical limits and possibilities, they suggested, are shaped by the material conditions in which people reproduce themselves and the species as a whole. Social life then, is explained by looking not just at the economy, but also at the biological

and cultural limits at play in any given historical moment.

As the influence of postmodernism has declined in recent years, a commitment to "intersectionality" has been taken up by left feminists more generally. This approach opens the door for an analysis of the way in which race, gender, sexuality and class, as different moments of a cohesive system, shape each other. It also allows us to see how ideology and identity can play important roles in determining our individual and collective responses to oppression and exploitation. And Holmstrom points out, as feminist activists take up the struggles against the "brutal economic realities of globalization" (cuts to social services, tightened immigration regulations, increased poverty), it becomes virtually impossible to ignore class. The social reproduction framework is well positioned to intervene in these debates, and show once again the relevance of a non-reductionist Marxism to feminism. ★

Socialism from below

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB

READERS OF *NEW SOCIALIST* will notice that this magazine supports *socialism from below*. What does this mean?

Socialism from below is simply one name in the English language for a particular kind of politics. Its key ideas can be summed up in eight propositions:

KEY IDEAS

1) In capitalist society, many people sell their ability to work to a small minority – the capitalist class – that controls workplaces and appropriates the goods and services produced in order to make profits.

2) There is an inescapable struggle (often subdued, but sometimes explosive) between these two groups because in capitalist society corporate profits take priority over the needs of people who sell their ability to work or who depend on wage-earners for survival (such as women doing unpaid labour in their homes) – the working class.

3) The working class has incredible potential power because its labour keeps capitalist society running: when workers collectively stop work, they bring the system to a halt.

4) The drive for profit at the expense of human needs gives the working class a real motivation to fight for change.

5) Through its struggles for change, the working class has the capacity to transform itself into a united force and organize to use its power to establish democratic control over all aspects of society.

6) By establishing this kind of democratic control, the working class carries out a social revolution and begins a process of transformation that can lead to a society without class divisions and state power (known as socialism or communism); this process can be begun but not completed within the borders of one country.

7) Liberation can only be won by people's own efforts, and cannot be achieved on their behalf by a minority, no matter how sincere.

8) Socialists fight for liberation from all forms of oppression (such as racism, sexism and heterosexism) as well as from class exploitation.

These are fundamental ideas shared by the different strands of the socialism from below tradition. All of them have had a lot more to say about the struggle for socialism and have had different viewpoints on various issues, as we'll see.

The term socialism from below was coined by the US socialist Hal Draper (1914-1990). What Draper calls socialism from below has also been known by other names, including revolutionary socialism, communism, and libertarian socialism. Confusingly, these terms have

also been used to refer to quite different kinds of politics too. This is one of the reasons why the term socialism from below is appealing.

A DIVERSE TRADITION

This article will not try to summarize the history of socialism from below. However, it's worth noting that socialism from below was not invented by Draper or any other thinker. These politics first arose among radical workers at the time of the revolutionary upheavals against the monarchies of Europe in the middle of the 1800s. They were first given a clear theoretical expression by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

Since then, socialism from below has arisen in different parts of the world and evolved in both positive and negative directions. Its fortunes have been intimately linked with those of movements of workers, peasants, women and other oppressed people. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and other revolutions of that period gave socialism from below its greatest boost. It was almost destroyed by the counter-revolutionary wave that established the Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship in Russia and fascism in several countries.

From its early days, the tradition of socialism from below has been a diverse one. Its supporters have argued, split, merged and changed as they have grappled with the difficult practical and theoretical challenges thrown up in the course of fighting for socialism in different times and places.

MARXISTS AND ANARCHISTS

One of the divisions that has cut through the socialism from below tradition is that between "Marxists" and "anarchists." This can be traced back to debates that took place during the rise of mass working-class movements in the second half of the 1800s.

In the 20th century, solidarity with the social revolutions in Russia in 1917 and Spain in 1936 brought many supporters of socialism from below together. Disagreements about why and when these revolutions failed led in turn to a hardening of divisions.

In short, both "Marxist" and "anarchist" camps have contained socialism from below militants as well as people with elitist and undemocratic politics that are the opposite of socialism from below. Today, activists from all strands of the socialism from below tradition need to reconsider our areas of agreement and disagreement in light of our contemporary situation, rather than debates from the past.

ACTIVISM AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY

Socialism from below isn't just about a long-term strategy for radical change, though it certainly is that. Orienting around the principle that liberation cannot be handed down but must be won by people themselves has immediate consequences for activists.

Above all, it means promoting ways of organizing that allow people to come together to identify their needs, determine their aims and decide how to achieve them. Anything that substitutes the activity of a minority (whether union officials, politicians, guerrillas or radical activists) for mass mobilization must be rejected.

Consistent socialist activists are vigorous advocates of democracy, militancy and solidarity in movements. Using this approach, we work with others to build the self-organization of workers and oppressed people. We also encourage others to come to understand that not only can people win gains within capitalism but that the working class has the power to create a new society.

ORGANIZATION

One of the issues on which there are real disagreements among supporters of socialism from below is how we should organize to take part in movements and struggles.

Many supporters of socialism from below have made the mistake of thinking that small organizations can act "as if" they were much larger groups of socialist activists rooted in a significant layer of the working class (what most Marxist supporters of socialism from below call a revolutionary party). Organizing along such "micro-party" lines is always harmful, and often leads groups to become sects that contribute little to movement-building.

If this "sectist" model is profoundly flawed, so is "spontaneism." Its supporters believe that the struggle for socialism can be successful without mass revolutionary socialist organizations. As a result, when they do actually organize as socialists they do so in ways that don't help socialist activists to make coordinated collective initiatives within movements. They also often downplay arguing for socialism.

In the view of the New Socialist Group, one of the challenges for socialists today is to build organizations of socialist activists that avoid the pitfalls of sectism and spontaneism. Unless we do so, socialism from below won't be able to become what it needs to be: a living, changing politics of hope and freedom that spreads within the movements of working people.★

(Socialism from below Con'td...) SUGGESTED READING:

Hal Draper, *The Two Souls of Socialism* (1966). Surveys socialist history and argues that there are two main traditions: socialism from below, and the various forms of elitist and anti-democratic "socialism from above." Available at www.newsocialist.org/documents

David McNally, *Socialism from Below* (2nd ed) (1997). Covers some important movements, thinkers and issues not discussed in Draper's essay. Available at www.newsocialist.org/group

David McNally, *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* (Arbeiter Ring, 2002). Chapter 7 argues that a renewed socialism from below can become a common framework for like-minded anti-capitalists from various backgrounds.

Lesbian and gay liberation and socialism

BY GARY KINSMAN

WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL I was often greeted with "commie pinko fag." Given I was gay and a socialist, it was the pinko part that perplexed me. Right-wingers often link homosexuality with socialism. What is the relation between lesbian and gay liberation and socialism?

While sexual activities between people of different and same genders have always been around, heterosexuality and homosexuality or lesbianism only emerged with the development of capitalist social relations several hundred years ago. These relations ripped apart feudal family-based production and created a pool of workers separated from the land with nothing to sell but their capacity to labour in the new factories and offices. In return for working for capitalists, workers received a wage that allowed some men to eat in pubs, to rent rooms in inns and to live beyond regulation by families. Some of these men organized their lives around their same-gender erotic desires and seized social spaces for themselves.

Capitalism often trapped women within the family where women reproduce the capacity of wage-workers to go to work and raise the next generation of workers. It was only with the "First Wave" of feminism in the 1800s and expanding possibilities for economic independence that some women established erotic networks with other women.

State and professional agencies responded to these same-gender erotic cultures by labeling those of us who came to be called homosexuals and lesbians as "perverts" and "deviants." These ideas mandated the police to criminalize all homosexual activity. Lesbians faced a greater social invisibility and the denial of women's independence from men.

In response to this "queer threat," a norm of male-dominated heterosexuality was institutionalized in the social and family policies of states – what I call heterosexual hegemony. Heterosexuality became the sexuality

of the ruling class and was then enforced on the working class.

Class struggles are not only fought in factories but also on the terrain of family and sexuality. Unfortunately, until recently much of the organized working class (with some important exceptions) has fought on the same side as ruling agencies against gay men, lesbians and feminism. This has led to divisions between and among workers and the oppressed. In contrast, socialists must support feminism and lesbian/gay liberation in challenging the ruling class's gender and sexual politics.

Out of the ferment of the 1960s, gay and lesbian liberation movements emerged. Gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people – who have reclaimed the word "queer" – have fought back. The basic message of queer liberation is that we need to control our own bodies and sexualities.

Only those who directly experience oppression can initiate movements that bring thousands of people into struggle for their own liberation. This is why NEW SOCIALIST fully supports movements of the oppressed. But because autonomous movements are not enough, socialists encourage left currents in queer movements that build coalitions with other oppressed groups. We also work in other movements and groups to win support for queer liberation.

Although gay and lesbian movements, with the support of feminists and unions, have won significant gains in Canada, a deeply rooted heterosexual hegemony which is tied up with capitalism remains. The important social spaces we have seized will remain precarious and highly policed as long as capitalist and heterosexual relations continue.

Because queer oppression is rooted in capitalism and heterosexual hegemony, full liberation requires a socialist transformation of society. Socialism involves the radical expansion of democracy so that working

and oppressed people can seize control over the circumstances shaping our lives. Queer liberation requires that people achieve control over our bodies and sexualities and an end to institutionalized heterosexuality.

In order to do this socialism must also be transformed so that the important insight that workers need

to control their factories and offices is extended to the need for people to control their bodies and sexualities. It is here that socialism from below and queer liberation fully come together and inform each other.★

Capitalism and immigration

BY KATHERINE GRZEJSZCZAK WITH TODD GORDON

Canadian capitalism is very dependent on cheap immigrant labour. This article ties the imperialist policies of countries like Canada to the international rise in global migration, and examines the Canadian state's use of racist immigration policies to create an extremely vulnerable class of Third World migrant labour. It argues that activists must make anti-racist solidarity organizing with immigrants central to their work.

WHETHER IN SEARCH OF refuge or a more prosperous economic future, people are increasingly crossing state borders. According to the United Nations there are currently 175 million people, or three percent of the world population, who reside outside of their country of birth. The number of migrants has more than doubled since 1970. Nine percent (16 million) of all migrants are refugees. This means that 91 percent of migrants leave their countries for reasons other than immediate danger to themselves or their families. The predominant reason for this type of migration is to attempt to improve a person's and/or their family's economic situation, living conditions and life chances. In other words, the majority of migrants are economic migrants.

In response to the massive movement of people across borders, state governments around the world are devising new ways of controlling migrants. Given this phenomena it is little wonder that organizing around issues of immigration has become the focus of a new layer of activists, not only in Canada but in other areas of the world.

While renewed immigration activism has brought the issue of refugees to the fore, it has been less successful in explaining economic migration, which accounts for the bulk of today's movement. An analysis of global capitalism and state power is central to understanding economic migration and increasingly restrictive immigration policies. Due in part to the weakness of Marxism among today's activists, there is a silence around issues underlying movement for economic purposes and the state's coercive response to it. It is easier and fairly straightforward to argue that refugees deserve protection from the wars, persecution, and internal

strife that have caused them to flee their countries. Some refugee rights activists rely on moral arguments to support their cause: "Canada is a great country, unlike those other countries that do not respect human rights, and therefore we have a moral responsibility to shelter those who are fleeing persecution."

But it is important to recognize the role that countries such as Canada play in creating the conditions which cause people to migrate in the first place, and how the Canadian state in turn uses this process to establish a cheap and vulnerable working class out of Third World migrant labour. To properly understand this, and assess its implications for activist work, we must address global capitalism and its relationship to imperialism, racism and nationalism.

So-called First World countries, including Canada, actively pursue policies in the Global South which push people to move. These imperialist policies involve military intervention and the imposition of economic imperatives that cause extreme impoverishment or outright destitution for local populations.

A good example of this is the role international financial organizations, such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and rich creditor nations (who have the greatest influence in the WB and IMF) play in imposing structural adjustment programs on Third World countries in exchange for badly needed loans. Structural adjustment programs frequently include massive cuts to state welfare programs, the selling off of public assets and the reduction of tariff barriers to more competitive capital from the Global North. They have been widely criticized for leading directly to increased poverty, unemployment and ecological destruction. In many cases, lands have

been so devastated by nearby industries and massive development projects funded by governments and multinationals of the North that people who live there have little choice but to move, while in some instances people are physically forced off their land or out of their communities.

At the same time, the use of economic subsidies by Canada, the US and European Union (EU) in industries that are central to the livelihood of many people in the Third World, such as agriculture, also has a very detrimental impact on the Global South. The subsidies enable producers in the North to flood world markets and drive down prices to the point where producers of the South simply cannot compete.

In the context of the Global North's aggressive pursuit of structural adjustment and use of agricultural subsidies, in which hundreds of millions of people have been left unemployed or displaced, migration becomes a means of survival, as people leave their communities and head for the rapidly growing urban centres of their countries or across borders to Canada, the US and the EU in search of work to support themselves and their families. Indeed, you can trace the destruction caused by the economic policies of the imperialist countries in, for instance, the Caribbean basin or the Philippines, and the corresponding increase in out-migration from these same countries over the same period.

The devastation caused by neoliberal economic interventions has not gone unchallenged. There have been protests led by affected communities all over the world. However, movements against restructuring or displacement are often met with violent reprisal, whether from military forces or from paramilitaries hired by corporations which stand to lose from the opposition. For example, when the Ogoni protested Shell's oil drilling on their land in Nigeria, the police were used to violently quell the resistance. In 1990, 80 Ogoni demonstrators were killed and 459 homes destroyed. In Mexico, the army has been used to fight the Zapatista uprising against displacement from their lands. Many more examples of this dynamic could be given. The bottom line is that military violence is used to implement the interests of global capital and defend policies that have disastrous consequences people in the Third World.

Canada, it must be stressed, actively engages in these imperialist practices. A major creditor nation, Canada has been a consistent supporter of structural adjustment policies, and has funded massive development projects, including dam building in China that has displaced hundreds of millions of people. There are also many examples of Canadian corporations – with the support of the Canadian state – ravaging the resources of the Global South and exploiting local labour

to do this. These companies, especially in the mining sector, have been implicated in serious human rights violations. In Columbia, for instance, Canadian mining companies have been linked to paramilitary death squads that target union and indigenous activists. In addition, the Canadian military has actively participated in or supported military interventions around the world. Canada supported the bloody Indonesian occupation of East Timor (and was one of Indonesia's major arms suppliers), has been occupying Afghanistan for three years, and recently supported the military coup against the democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti.

It is not only conditions in source countries that lead to the movement of people. Economies of the Global North rely on cheap immigrant labour. This has actually been a regular feature of capitalist history. During England's Industrial Revolution, labour shortages were filled by pushing peasants off their farmland, which led to migration to cities where capitalist production was rapidly growing. Here they worked for meager wages in the growing industries. During early periods in which raw goods were being exported from the Americas, Africans were brought in as slave labourers to extract these goods. In Canada, Chinese migrants were brought in to fill the labour shortages in the early stages of the country's industrial development. There have been programs recruiting live-in domestic workers in this country for over 100 years and to recruit farm workers for the last 40.

The shift to neoliberalism has exacerbated these trends. In the face of increasing global competition, capital has sought to increase profitability and drive down labour costs. While the Canadian state has pursued strategies to drive down the costs of Canadian-born workers and increase their vulnerability – by attacking labour laws and union rights, cutting social benefits and using contract and part-time labour – it has also relied heavily on immigrant labour.

The vast majority of jobs characterized by low pay, difficult and dangerous working conditions, instability, irregular hours, lack of benefits, social stigma and a lack of advancement opportunities are done by immigrant labour, if not by Canadian-born racial minorities, women, or youth. Immigrants do the kinds of jobs that others will not do, and this is precisely why they are so important to First World countries. Indeed, this is the conscious aim of immigration policy in Canada. Playing on the desperation of Third World migrants (for which Canada is partly responsible), and mobilizing deeply rooted racist attitudes towards persons of colour, it severely circumscribes their rights.

For example, access to full-citizenship status is denied to most immigrants entering the country to work.

The requirements for obtaining status are so restrictive that they exclude huge categories of immigrants. In 1973, 57% of all migrants to Canada classified as “workers” entered with permanent resident status. Twenty years later, that number had dropped to 30%. In order to obtain permanent residence in Canada before arrival, an applicant must accumulate sufficient “points”. Only those who are fluent in English or French, have a university education, an arranged job in Canada, and at least four years of skilled work have a chance of obtaining enough “points” to get citizenship.

It is virtually impossible for economic migrants that show up in Canada without pre-arranged landed immigrant status to get status. At constant risk of deportation, non-status workers have no access to the social benefits and protections that are offered to “citizens,” which in turn makes them super-exploitable. Non-status migrants are barred from services such as subsidized housing, health insurance, social assistance, student loans, and in some provinces legal aid, despite the fact that these people are much more likely to be living in poverty than other segments of the population. In the case of the temporary worker program, which includes domestic and agricultural labourers, immigrants are not covered by labour law and are not allowed to change employers – extremely coercive conditions of employment that leave people susceptible to all kinds of abuse. Those immigrants who cannot obtain the permits required to work legally in Canada comprise the steadily growing underground economy. All of these factors contribute to the forcing of Third World immigrants into jobs for which they are often over-qualified, and where they face the worst conditions the Canadian labour market has to offer.

The industries immigrants typically end up in are those where the labour needs to be done locally in order to keep the economy functioning, but which would not be profitable at pay levels needed to attract large numbers of full-time Canadian-born workers. These industries include all types of service provision, construction work, cleaning, transport, domestic work and sex work. Jobs in these industries are characterized as “unskilled”, and the pay is low relative to the working conditions. One of the reasons employers work very hard in these industries to keep wages low is they are considered “low productivity”. “Low productivity” refers to the fact that capital investment (tools, machinery, technologies etc.) in many of these industries does not tremendously increase labour productivity (certainly not compared to capital-intensive industries like auto manufacturing). For example, you can give cleaners stronger cleaning solutions which may somewhat decrease the time it takes to clean a bathroom, but beyond that the time to do this job, and thus the costs

beyond wages, cannot be cut down significantly. Profitability, in other words, is very wage sensitive; the best way to increase profits is to cut down on labour costs.

Thus, one of the most effective ways for employers to keep down costs in these industries is by drawing from an army of highly vulnerable and badly paid migrant workers. The labour is cheap, but it is nevertheless pivotal to the economy. For an office building to function in Canada, for example, it will need cleaners, security guards and catering services. And more highly-paid workers there will need dry cleaners, taxi drivers, cooks, servers and dishwashers working at their lunch restaurants and coffee shops, hairdressers, caregivers for their children, cleaners for their homes and people to build their houses.

So the capitalist economy cannot function without a class of people in the imperialist centre who are excluded from the benefits that come with living in the imperialist centre. The global domination of certain nations is reproduced within the dominating nations themselves. Individual and institutional racism helps extend the inferior status of certain nations onto its people, even after they have geographically moved into the First World.

The trends described here, framed by the deep-seated racist character of Canadian society, will continue, as Canada and other First World countries, with aging populations and low fertility rates, become increasingly dependant on cheap labour from the Global South. The Canadian government’s annual Report on the Demographic Situation in Canada reports that, in order to sustain economic growth, the country will have to rely on increased levels of migration. As it reports this, however, immigration policy, as we have noted, remains very restrictive towards people from the Third World. This doesn’t mean that Canada doesn’t want those labourers, however, just that it wants them on its terms.

The shaping of the working class in Canada via restrictive immigration policies places certain demands on activists in our struggles for social justice. Cheap immigrant labour plays an increasingly important role for Canadian capital and the state. Thus solidarity with immigrants must be central to our political work. It also follows from this that serious anti-racist analysis must influence our understanding of capitalism and the struggles against it. Racism has been an integral part of capitalist history, and the deeply rooted white supremacist nature of Canadian society is a basis upon which Third World migrants can be systematically excluded from citizenship rights and forced into the worst kinds of work. So we can’t properly take up the struggle for social justice in Canada if we don’t make the struggle

against racism and racist immigration policy central to what we do.

This also means challenging Canadian nationalism, which is not only a right-wing phenomenon, but has resonance on the left as well. The nationalist call for Canadian independence or “sovereignty”, not uncommon among some union leaders, NGOs and writers, is premised on the mistaken idea that Canada is a subordinate nation dependant on the US (some employ the term “dependency” – typically used to describe Third World countries’ relations to the US and Europe – with the qualifier “rich” in front of it). It is based on the dangerous notion that a Canada completely sovereign from the US would naturally be a fairer and more just place (not being influenced unduly by the Americans anymore). This obscures Canada’s own imperialist role in the world as a major capitalist economy, its colonialist history and the racist nature of the Canadian state, while not challenging artificial borders which are the product of capitalist history and facilitate the state’s racist manipulation of the labour supply. Although activists demand reforms from the state, such as better services for people, including immigrants, and a radical change to immigration laws, we can’t lose site of the role played by the state in general, and in Canada in

particular, in terms of imperialism and coercive immigration policy.

Our organizing, then, must challenge wherever possible Canadian nationalism and the sanctity of Canadian borders. It must be based instead on relations of solidarity with immigrants struggling for better working conditions, access to social services and equal rights in Canada. We must organize not to highlight the importance of our borders, but to challenge them and the restrictions placed on the free movement of people.

This organizing must involve the demand for status and access to services that citizens receive, as people involved in the Status and Don’t Ask Don’t Tell campaigns are doing in Toronto. But the struggle for immigrant rights must also be taken up much more vigorously by unions. Indeed, as some of the most exploited workers in our society, whose labour Canadian business is increasingly dependant on, immigrants will be central to the renewal of the currently sluggish union movement. Sadly, however, most union leaders appear unwilling to take up this important challenge, and will likely only do so in the face of serious pressure from immigrants themselves, with the support of other activists, including the union rank-and-file.

These are not easy tasks, but they are necessary in the struggle for a more socially just world.★

Home sweet home: Gender and immigration

BY INGRID VAN DER KLOET AND MARIE VAN DER KLOET

ON THE LEFT, IMMIGRATION policy is seen as a tool used by the State to form class relations. According to this approach, the Canadian State facilitates the labour needs of the ruling class by implementing policies that ensure that ample, cheap and unorganized workers are readily available. Labour and immigration policy work together to create a hierarchy between workers that benefits ruling class interests. For example, Chinese railway workers, Italian labourers and Caribbean domestic workers have all gained entry to Canada to work in specific, “undesirable” industries in circumstances in which this work was considered intolerable for “authentic” Canadians, presumably White and Anglo-Saxon.

Although such an approach undoubtedly reveals a significant goal of Canadian immigration policy, viewing immigration through this lens alone obscures the gendered impact immigration policies have on the private sphere. The State has structured gender relations

through the regulation of human movement. Although immigration is usually seen as part of the public sphere (e.g. labour, the state), immigration policy also works to structure the private lives of those who reside within the borders of Canada.

The Chinese Exclusion Act (1923) is a key example of how State immigration policy shaped gender relations within an immigrant community. The Act prohibited the families of Chinese workers from immigrating. As a result, the Canadian government created a community of male workers who would not organize in their workplaces to demand a “family wage,” would not be able to participate in the privilege of the heterosexual family and would be “emasculated” by being forced to perform domestic (“women’s”) work.

Immigration policy also plays a role in producing the public/private divide. In Canadian capitalism, labour is divided between unpaid work in the home and paid work outside of the home. Immigration Canada

reinforces this divide and ensures women's domestic work is invisible. Although the Canadian State does not see itself as responsible for work in the home, it has actively recruited domestic workers to work for wealthy families from the nineteenth century until today. These workers have primarily been immigrant women. Increasingly, women of colour represent the majority of these workers and changes made by Immigration Canada ensure little possibility of them gaining permanent status in Canada. The Canadian State has contributed to the need for immigrant domestic workers by failing to create a program for universal childcare. Wealthier women can hire poor women of colour to care for their children and homes, allowing them to work in the public sphere which receives more social and economic validation. Through its racist and sexist immigration policies, the Canadian State has reinforced the structure of the public (labour) and the private (home, family) sphere.

CANADIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Canadian feminist movements have always been concerned with immigration, although not necessarily in ways we would desire or expect. During the "first wave" women's movement in Canada (1910-1925) women fought for the vote and to be recognized as "persons" under the law. In 1910, a new immigration act was passed allowing the government to restrict immigration based on race, class, occupation or "character." First wave feminists reinforced and reproduced the Canadian government's racist policies to pursue their own political agenda. The suffragists argued that they were the "mothers of the nation," who were able to ensure the racial purity of the nation and thereby should be entitled to the vote. These suffragists, such as Emily Murphy and Nelly McClung, drew on the racism of the Canadian elites, arguing that by giving white Northern European women the vote, the influence of recent immigrants and non-white Canadians would be diminished.

First and second wave feminists demanded women's rights on the basis of being good and deserving citizens. These movements were primarily composed of and represented the interests of white, middle-class women. This group's interests were acknowledged by the Canadian government, and allowed feminist organizations of the 1960s through to the 1980s to take on advisory roles on issues pertaining directly and indirectly to immigration policy. Feminist complicity with state interests was clearly shown in their approach to policies on domestic labour. State funded organizations, such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), did not challenge the Canadian government's neglect of unpaid work in the home. Neither NAC, nor the Canadian government supported

a national daycare program, and as a result there was a continuing need for private childcare. The interests of domestic workers, who were primarily migrant and immigrant women, were excluded from NAC's project of developing women's rights on the basis of Canadian citizenship.

Currently, domestic workers are primarily immigrants from the Third World, specifically the Philippines and the Caribbean. The regulation of domestic workers' visa requirements has become increasingly complicated and inequitable. When these workers were primarily European, the government expected them to integrate into the Canadian nation. Now that domestic workers are primarily non-European, there have been successive steps to diminish the possibility of obtaining citizenship/permanent status in Canada. Currently, Immigration Canada's live-in caregiver programme denies women the possibility of applying for permanent residence until they have worked two years with the same Canadian employer. Like the Canadian government, NAC and other liberal feminist organizations have been primarily concerned with increasing the presence of middle-class women in the public sphere, and have not taken up the needs of immigrant and poor women working in cleaning, food service and childcare.

Currently, institutional feminism, such as feminist social work and academic feminism, are both implicated in and challenge racism and sexism in Canadian immigration policy. Academic feminism and government organizations have a relationship that is mutually, but not equitably, beneficial. The government provides funding for research projects such as York University's Gender, Migration and Citizenship Project. Funding such projects makes the government appear to be addressing racism and sexism in immigration policy. In exchange, the receipt of such funding validates the work of academic feminists within the university. We acknowledge that many academic feminists, including those involved in the project above, are challenging racism and sexism in Canadian immigration. However there are limits on the extent to which feminist research can challenge its funder: the State.

Feminist-influenced social work, such as women's shelters, is also limited in its ability to redress the inequities that immigrant women face. Social work is intended to diminish rather than resolve conflict, particularly conflicts which benefit the ruling class and the state. Gender and race conflict are inherent to Canadian capitalism. Feminist social work has tried to smooth over these conflicts by imposing a western feminist understanding of gender relations on immigrant communities. Feminist social service providers partially address this problem by providing anti-racism

training and affirmative action policies aimed at hiring immigrant women. In order to fully address the inequities that immigrant women face, feminist social work must undergo radical change and work in conjunction with self-organized immigrant communities.

Grassroots self-organizing of immigrant women is another potential way to transform Canada's immigration policy. Recently, the Philippine Women's Centre has been successful in organizing Filipina domestic workers in the live-in caregiver programme. This organizing exists outside institutional/governmental power structures, and thus is able to take on a critical, anti-racist and anti-capitalist analysis of immigration. Social movements and community-organizing can challenge Immigration Canada in ways that institutional feminism cannot.

Concerns about the racism and sexism underlying immigration policy are at risk of being pushed aside by the growing academic interest in theoretical discussions of borders and citizenship. It has become trendy to talk about porous borders and flexible citizenship. Such an argument fails to address how race, class and gender continue to restrict immigration.

BORDERS AND CITIZENSHIP

Borders have been and continue to be a colonial project that divide space according to national lines. Borders became increasingly rigid when Canada began to separate from the British Empire. At this time, passports, a device to regulate immigration, were introduced and provided on a restricted basis. This restriction was often based on race, such as the refusal to grant passports to immigrants from India, despite their membership in the Commonwealth (1906-1915). Re-

cent discussions have proposed that national borders are becoming increasingly meaningless and less documentation is required in order to move freely between countries, however this applies only to specific citizens in privileged nations.

The idea of flexible citizenship where people have the ability to claim citizenship, work, or engage in leisure activities in several different countries applies primarily to the global elite. For migrant workers, restrictions on movement both within and between countries have increased. In the case of domestic workers, state regulation of movement and labour extends beyond the public sphere into the home. While borders are becoming more open for the global elite, for immigrant and migrant workers borders dictate where you can live, work and travel.

While Canadian feminists have primarily focused on the interests of white middle class women, similarly discussions of flexible citizenship focus on the global elite. Neither of these perspectives account for the experience of working class and immigrant women. In order to create an anti-racist feminist critique of Immigration policy, it is crucial to address how the state structures work in both the public and private spheres. The question of "women and immigration" is intimately connected to the creation of the Canadian working-class through the control of peoples' movement. We believe it is important for the left to grapple with the history of racism and anti-immigrant bias of both the mainstream women's/feminist organizations and workers' organizations. The systemic racism and sexism of the Canadian state extends beyond the workplace, and into our homes and social movements.★

The racist war at home

BY SIMA ZEREHI.

THE MASS MOBILIZATIONS AGAINST the war in Iraq were an inspiring beginning to the anti-racism/anti-war/anti-occupation movement. However, as we move into the next phase of organizing, it is important to continue to build stronger links between the US-led invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan with the war at home against First Nations people, immigrants, refugees, and poor and working people.

MIGRATION

Despite the shortcomings of our movement to address the issues of Canada's racist immigration policies, immigration is very much an anti-war and anti-occupation issue. Migration statistics bear out the connection between war, occupation and immigration. According to the United Nations, the war on Iraq is expected to create an estimated 900,000 refugees. The current estimates of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reveal that the war has already displaced more than 300,000 people within Iraq.

The number of Iraqi's seeking asylum is not surprising, as we saw the same catastrophic effects in the af-

termath of the war and occupation of Afghanistan. The US Committee for Refugees (USCR) estimates that by the end of 2001 one million Afghans had been internally displaced due to war and occupation. At the end of 2001, some 4.5 million Afghans were living as refugees in other countries, making Afghanistan the biggest producer of refugees in the world. In Europe, the number of asylum applications by Afghans increased by 60 percent and made Afghanistan the source of the largest number of asylum seekers in Europe in 2001. To add to the statistics, there are between 20 and 25 million “Internally Displaced People” worldwide, a number that is not included in the refugee statistics produced by the UN. Not surprisingly, many of these refugees are in countries in which the US or the UN have intervened in the last couple of decades; countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Soviet Union, Sudan, Angola, Sri Lanka, Colombia and of course Afghanistan.

THE ECONOMY OF BORDER SECURITY

Despite these alarming facts, to this date the “Peace” movement focused primarily on the bombings of Iraq and whether Chretien would publicly support the war or simply send troops and battleships to assist the US occupation. In the meantime, as activists were distracted by the smokescreen of war, representatives from Ontario and its neighbouring American states met at the Great Lakes Security Summit in Toronto to discuss the “harmonization” of Canadian and American borders. Fittingly, the conference was hosted by two of the most outspoken supporters of the war on Iraq, Ontario Premier Ernie Eves and the Ontario Minister of Public Safety and Security, Bob Runciman.

The mandate of this conference, which brought together Canadian and US government and immigration officials, as well as police and corporate bosses, was the integration of all levels of policing at the borders as well as the harmonization of Canadian and US security laws. The ultimate goal was to create a blue print for a long-term infrastructure guaranteeing the free flow of material goods and capital without interference from tighter border control. As Eves said in a press release announcing the conference, “[s]tronger security along our border would help ensure the free flow of goods, services and people across the Ontario-New York border to keep our economies strong.” Implicit in this statement is the connection between border control and the economy.

The real agenda of the summit was to facilitate neo-liberal globalization: the free movement of capital and goods, but zero mobility for workers. Above all, capitalism uses border security, immigration laws and policies, racial profiling and police brutality as tools to ex-

plot migrants as a cheap source of labour. We don’t have to go far to see the effects of Canadian and US immigration policies on the lives of displaced people. The people driving our cabs, washing our dishes, cleaning our homes, schools and offices, and delivering our food are oftentimes immigrants, refugees or undocumented people with few other options for employment. Immigration laws reinforce the vicious exploitation of migrants by threatening deportation or detention.

To facilitate the exploitation of immigrants, politicians like Ernie Eves constantly fan the flames of racism with their insistence on tougher border security and increased policing of racialized communities. Thinly veiled beneath this hysteria, however, is an attempt to distract voters from the real failures of capitalism – unemployment, poverty, cut backs to social services and so on.

IMMIGRATION

It’s no surprise that since September 11, 2001, under the smokescreen of the war against Afghanistan and then Iraq, the Canadian immigration system has taken so many steps backwards. On June 28, 2002 the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act was passed into law with a number of troubling amendments. Left out of the Act were appeal processes for refugee claimants. In addition, all refugee claimants now have only 28 days after their interview with a Refugee Protection Officer to put together a Personal Information Form — an impossibly short time for many. To make matters worse, all required documents must be submitted 20 days in advance of a hearing with the Immigration and Refugee Board. Finally, the number of initial decision-makers on a panel has been reduced from two board members to one. As a result, refugee protection decisions, which are often a matter of life or death, are now made by a single decision-maker with no right of appeal. One of the most striking new changes to the Canadian Immigration system is the signing of the “safe third country” agreement with the US in December of 2002. The danger of this agreement is that once implemented, many refugee claimants coming through the US and other countries will be automatically turned away at the border. The agreement leaves no opportunity for asylum seekers to explain why they wish to flee the US, and many of those turned back will not even be allowed to apply for refugee status in the US, as the US requires refugee claimants to apply within the first year of arrival. The safe third country agreement significantly limits the number of people able to apply for refugee status in Canada as many of the avenues of international travel to Canada are rooted through the US. Currently, fifteen thousand refugees come to Canada via the US border every year. Unfortunately, this agreement could be extended to many other countries

that the Canadian government deems as “safe”, despite the reality that the safety of a country is often gauged by its trade relations with Canada, rather than by its human rights record.

The “Special Registration” procedures implemented in the US after September 11 target male adults over the age of sixteen from many predominantly Muslim countries. The threat of detention or deportation implicit in these procedures have prompted hundreds of non-status people in the US to flee to Canada in order to avoid deportation to their country of origin. In response to this influx of asylum seekers at the end of January of 2003, the Canadian government started to direct refugee claimants at the border back to the US to wait for an appointment. People are sent back regardless of whether they are suffering from trauma, are pregnant, have small children, or are without any money or a place to stay. Waiting periods could extend up to seven weeks before an interview. In many cases, claimants are jailed in the US and are therefore unable to return to Canada to pursue their claim. Families are broken apart and stranded at the border as husbands and fathers are detained due to visa violations. Few refugees are able to pay the thousands of dollars in bonds in order to secure a release. Many have no choice but to remain in jail or face deportation to their home country. Ultimately, the direct-backs break families apart and rob refugees of the opportunity to explain their fear of persecution in the United States or their country of origin.

The most alarming change to Canadian immigration policy over the past year has been the detention of more and more refugee claimants upon arrival in Canada. Under new Immigration Canada ‘instructions’, issued January 27, 2003, officers have the right to detain claimants if ‘sufficient’ identity documents are not produced, or interviewees show any hesitancy in response to questioning. Many refugees who are in shock or under severe stress and cannot readily answer questions are therefore detained. Similarly, those who have had to flee their homes at a moments notice, without time or ability to get proper identification or documents, will find themselves behind bars in Canada. Unfortunately, even after the desired documentation is provided some claimants are not released from detention until they post a bond (an average of \$5,000 to \$10,000 set by Immigration Canada officers), an impossible task for many refugees who have spent their life savings trying to get to Canada.

To make matters worse, Canadian politicians, with Bob Runciman at the forefront, are openly calling for increased detention of all undocumented people living in Canada. To facilitate this plan, Immigration Canada is publicly discussing leasing a section of an Ontario

“super jail” in a concerted move to expand facilities for long-term immigration detention, despite the fact that existing detention centres like the ‘family’ detention facility at Toronto’s Celebrity Inn have a despicable history. Beside the lack of access to basic needs such as fresh air or exercise, there have been reports of the denial of essential supplies to Canadian-born infants and children in jail because their only caregivers are their ‘illegal’ parents. While the current model of detention facilities in Canada is disturbing, the purposed changes to this model are even more frightening. Anti-immigration advocates like Minister of Immigration Denis Coderre and Bob Runciman have been pushing for Canada to adopt an “Australian-style” detention policy, which requires the detention of all asylum seekers prior to adjudication of their claims. Australia’s system has forced detained people who have fled civil war and poverty abroad to sew their lips shut in hunger strikes, to fling themselves against razor wire perimeters, to riot and attempt escapes into the desert, and to languish without decent food, legal support and proper education for their children and without any assurance of release for years.

ATTACKS ON NON-CITIZENS AT HOME AND ABROAD

The attacks on immigrants and refugees don’t end at the border. Once landed, all residents are required to carry at all times a Permanent Resident identification card. Bio-identification is micro-encrypted at the back of the card in addition to the cardholders’s entire immigration file. If a cardholder leaves Canada without their card they will be rejected re-entry. This card must be updated every five years, requiring residents to provide a complete history of their activities over the past five years. Furthermore, new legislation (Bill C-18) now makes landed status revocable in the case of serious criminal activity. Those convicted of any crime are denied the ability to ever sponsor anyone.

In addition to the attacks on non-citizens at home, the Canadian government has given a low priority to processing refugees abroad for resettlement. In fact, it is very likely that the government will fail to meet its own targets for resettled refugees in 2003, leaving thousands of refugees to remain in limbo. The government’s response to the shortage of resources dedicated to refugee resettlement is to charge refugees fees for the privilege of being processed for resettlement to Canada. This would mean that much like the point system used to process immigrants, only affluent refugees could hope to settle in Canadian.

Amina Shirazee, an immigration lawyer and member of Lawyers Against the War, summed up the Canadian immigration system best in a recent interview with ZNET. She said: “It is classist, racist, and sexist. It grants the power to discriminate. So, if you are poor,

you are classified as an economic immigrant and not allowed refuge. If you are wealthy, you can be an economic immigrant as well. The difference is that you can enter. The criteria is simple – you have to have \$400,000. Canadian residency is for sale.”

FIGHTING BACK

While the racist war launched against immigrants, refugees, migrant workers and non-status people in Canada has been relentless in its pursuit to marginalize and silence communities of colour, these communities

have not given up the fight. Even at the risk of increased racial profiling by the police, and the ever-present threats of deportation or detention, immigrant and refugee communities have taken to the streets in larger and larger numbers to raise their voices in solidarity with the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. Community initiated groups like the *Commite de Sans Status* in Montreal are an inspiring reminder that immigrants and refugees are not “victims”, but communities with the ability to self-organize and fight back.★

Reformism

BY ANGUS THEOURS

SOME LEFTIES USE “REFORMIST” as a term of abuse, to dismiss people and organizations that are less radical than they might like. That is a big mistake. Revolutionaries need the political skills and the patience to work with people who are less radical than them. Furthermore, debasing valuable political concepts like “reformism” makes it much harder to analyze the actual state of the class struggle.

When Marxists talk about reformism, we are actually talking about three different things. First there are certain organizations (and the people who are members of them) that we call reformist, like the NDP. Second, reformism also refers to a conscious political strategy for dealing with capitalism that some people advocate. In that sense, reformism refers to a specific political ideology that shapes the behavior of some people. Finally, reformism also refers to a complex social and political process by which some organizations broker compromises between capital and labour, in other words, a social process of class collaboration.

CLASS COLLABORATION

For most of the last 200 years, the capitalist class has ruled through a pretty naked use of force, including economic coercion, state repression and ideological manipulation. Until the 1940s, they relied primarily on a strategy of class confrontation, employing their power quite openly.

However, for the past 50 years, Canadian capitalists have relied far more upon class collaboration to maintain their rule. The ruling class was forced to shift strategies because the combined impact of the Great Depression, World War II, the growth of the working class and labour militancy in the 1940s shifted the balance of power between capital and labour.

Softening the old methods of rule with new mechanisms of class collaboration required the creation of new laws and institutions (labour laws, labour boards, etc.). Employers and the state also had to find new ways to transform unions, which grew enormously in the 1940s, into dependable intermediaries between capital and labour.

Class collaboration depends upon the existence of organizations that cut deals to determine the terms of the continued exploitation and oppression of workers. With such arrangements, a tiny ruling class can continue to exploit and oppress a large and potentially powerful working class, without the constant fear of facing a fight to the finish by the entire working class. Class collaboration places a whole layer of union officials and other professional reformists – people with a real stake in making capitalism work, even when it means presiding over diminished living standards – between capitalists and the working class. They become experts at brokering “compromises” between capital and labour.

UNIONS

Today, trade unions provide the classic example of a reformist organization. But that was not always true. When they first developed, trade unions were small, local organizations that expressed the need for workers to combine in their own defence. However, over time, unions became much larger and more bureaucratic organizations whose officials were increasingly removed from the everyday experience of workers. When unions became a real threat, the ruling class sought to neutralize them by enmeshing them in complex and legalistic processes of class collaboration.

Canadian capitalists adopted a strategy of class collaboration in the 1940s, using new labour laws to promote the bureaucratization of unions, and to compel them to engage in class collaboration. The new social arrangement encouraged union officials to prevent militancy (except when it was tightly controlled by them) and cooperate with employers and the state.

Today, unions negotiate over the conditions of the continued exploitation of workers by capital. They do not question the necessity for capitalism or the desirability of cooperation between capital and labour. Indeed, as bureaucratic organizations with large incomes from membership dues collected by order of the labour laws, unions are highly dependent upon collaboration. As a consequence, union leaders are preoccupied with strengthening the process of class collaboration and convincing both employers and workers of its continued value.

The loyalty of most trade union officials to class collaboration and capitalism is reinforced by the privileges (like high salaries and better jobs) that come with their jobs. This makes them highly unreliable allies for workers in any real struggle with capital.

Despite all this, trade unions sometimes provide a framework within which workers can rebel against class collaboration and fight their exploitation. For that reason, while today's unions can give workers a greater potential to engage in collective struggle, they most often demobilize workers before the struggle becomes militant or radical.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

When working-class political parties first emerged in the 19th century, they contained advocates of both class collaboration and class struggle. By the 1920s, the advocates of revolution had formed their own parties, leaving behind parties whose leaders sought collaboration between capital and labour. Today, the NDP's politics are class collaborationist.

But the membership of social democratic parties has always included many workers who did not share their leaders' absolute commitment to class collaboration. Many trade unionists and rank and file NDPers believe that workers need their own organizations to defend their interests. That does not mean they automatically accept the goal of class collaboration.

REFORMIST CONSCIOUSNESS

Social democratic politicians and union officials practice class collaboration as the solution to the problems facing workers and the oppressed. Their commitment is expressed in a reformist ideology they seek to promote through the media, conventions, and union or party literature.

Reformist ideology is based on a belief that capitalist society can be made more fair, equitable and democratic without a revolution. All that is required are reformist organizations with leaders skilled enough to make use of institutions of class collaboration. In that way, reformist organizations can strengthen their ability to negotiate compromises between capital and labour. Class collaboration is not merely a means to some other end, but an end in itself. It is the epitome of capitalism made more humane and civilized.

There is also a more left-wing version of reformist ideology. It holds that struggles are necessary to change society, but sets limits on them. It always rules out revolution, no matter how radical its rhetoric.

Although class collaboration is actively promoted by reformist leaders, most trade unionists and community activists and many NDP members are not unconditional adherents of reformism. Their acceptance of it as the best way to change things depends upon the ability of class collaborationist organizations to deliver the goods and on the absence of compelling evidence that struggle works better. When faced with clear evidence that collaborating with bosses and the state doesn't work and that their own struggles are an alternative, many will begin to abandon class collaboration.

MIXED CONSCIOUSNESS

Beyond labour and community activists, the working class is not homogeneous. There are sections of it with quite different experiences of the system they live under, the organizations and movements they are part of, and their own capacities to change the world. While some workers may conditionally accept the claims of union leaders and NDP politicians about the values of class collaboration, many more do not even think about such issues most of the time.

Many workers are too alienated from the system and have too little experience of their potential power to concern themselves with large-scale political issues – things that seem well beyond their influence or control. Jaded by their own experience of powerlessness, “politics” disgusts them. They neither accept nor reject class collaboration, regarding such big issues as far less important than the personal matters they can actually influence. Thus, most workers are neither advocates nor opponents of reformism.

BRAINWASHED?

This understanding of reformism enables us to understand what is wrong with seemingly radical arguments about why most workers are not revolutionary. For example, many activists are influenced by an argument that has been popularized by US writer Noam Chomsky. He argues that workers' consciousness is so dominated by ruling-class media that they are brain-

washed into compliance. This makes it difficult to see how the mass of workers could ever revolt.

However, Chomsky's viewpoint sees workers as passive receptacles for the ruling-class ideas that rain down on us from on high. It ignores the fact that people are always engaged in making sense of the world around them, based on their own experience. Because that understanding is sometimes based on experiences of solidarity and struggle, workers are sometimes able to construct alternative views about the world, despite the ideological views being promoted by the ruling class and reformists.

Most workers, most of the time, have a mixture of often contradictory ideas about the world around them.

That mixture often combines elements of capitalist and reformist ideology with a willingness to engage in collective struggle in the right circumstances, and a pragmatic day to day willingness to comply with things that seem unchangeable. In other words, workers have not been brainwashed in any simplistic sense. That is why it is so important to create situations where people can experience their collective power to change things.

It is much easier to do that if we understand the complex nature of reformism as a social phenomenon. Such an understanding requires us to avoid reducing the term from a concept of political analysis to a mere insult.★

The history of revolution and the future of anti-capitalism

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB

A CENTURY AGO, prominent capitalists, politicians and writers in many countries warned that workers' revolution threatened "civilization." In 1919, many of Canada's rulers saw the Winnipeg General Strike as verging on revolution (unfortunately, although the working people of Winnipeg showed great unity and militant workers in other cities struck in solidarity with them, the country wasn't on the brink of revolution).

In Canada and most other advanced capitalist countries, to talk of revolution today seems utterly unreal. The real history of revolutions is buried. Most books and movies depict revolutions as eruptions of irrational violence whose inevitable result was tyranny. Today marketers use the term "revolutionary" to sell everything from anti-wrinkle cream to computers. The meaning of revolution isn't clear at all.

Nevertheless, anyone who wants to see capitalism replaced by a better kind of society – one profoundly democratic and geared to meeting people's needs in an ecologically sustainable manner – needs to cut through the confusion surrounding the idea of revolution. To do this, we need to look at the history of revolutions.

The word "revolution" has been used to refer to different things. In ancient times, it expressed the yearning of the poor for liberation. In the 1800s, after the French Revolution had shaken Europe and the Haitian Revolution challenged colonialism, revolution came to mean a radical change of society that would

replace capitalism's private property and narrow individualism with different priorities such as human needs and the common good.

The 20th century saw many revolutions – perhaps most famously the Russian Revolution of 1917 – and other upheavals. Yet the fate of the Russian Revolution sowed enormous confusion and numerous misconceptions about revolution and socialism. Few people understood how a genuine popular revolution had indeed taken place, but that the isolated and fragile rule of the working class supported by the peasantry was then subsequently destroyed from within. The Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship that had consolidated itself by the end of the 1920s was the fruit of a counter-revolution, not the natural outgrowth of the revolution of 1917. This monstrous regime called itself "Communist" and used the language of revolution to justify exploitation at home and counter-revolutionary policies abroad. When it and others like it collapsed after 1989, many people concluded that revolution and an alternative to capitalism were now a thing of the past.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL REVOLUTIONS

To sort all this out, our starting point should be to distinguish between two quite different kinds of revolution, which we can call political revolutions and social revolutions.

Political revolutions change the government or sweep away one set of state institutions (for example, those of a one-party regime or the personal rule of a

dictator) and replace them with another (such as liberal democracy) without uprooting the power of the small minority of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and others who rule. Such revolutions may bring about real reforms, but they do not lead to a fundamental transformation of how society is organized.

The Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 was an example of this kind of revolution. It involved considerable popular mobilization and an insurrection that toppled the brutal US-backed regime of Somoza. A radical nationalist government was formed by the Sandinista Front for National Liberation. It proceeded to carry out social reforms that improved the lives of people in the countryside and the cities. But the revolution never broke the power of the whole ruling class or replaced it with the direct democratic control of society by the country's workers and small farmers. Nicaraguan capitalists continued to control much of the economy. The US government armed and funded vicious right-wing "contra" forces to fight the Sandinistas. In 1990 the Sandinistas lost parliamentary elections, and a right-wing government took office.

Social revolutions are more radical than political revolutions. They don't just change governments or state institutions, they transfer ruling power in society from one class to another. Though all social revolutions have this in common, there have been several different kinds of social revolutions in the past four centuries.

One kind of social revolution promotes the development of capitalism. Such revolutions can be called bourgeois revolutions, although we shouldn't think that many bankers and factory-owners took to the streets themselves. The English Revolution of the 1640s and the French Revolution of the 1790s were this kind of revolution. Both involved struggles among ruling-class factions and "middling" elements who mobilized the poor to serve their own interests. Significantly, radical movements of the poor also arose in these upheavals: the Levellers and Diggers in England and the sans-culottes in France. These revolutions eliminated social arrangements that stood in the way of the development of capitalism, which was a drawn-out process that took place over many decades.

A different kind of social revolution took place in a number of "Third World" societies in the 20th century. The main fighters in these revolutions were peasants, but these revolutions were led by militarized anti-imperialist parties that were not democratically run by peasants themselves. Where they were victorious, these revolutions of national liberation broke the power of much-hated rulers backed by imperialism. Unfortunately, control of society passed from landlords and capitalists to a new ruling class of "Communist" offi-

cialists who established one-party states on the model of the USSR and set about developing national industries. Revolutions of this kind took place in China, Cuba, Vietnam and elsewhere.

SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

There is also another kind of social revolution, one that demonstrates the potential to establish the direct administration of social life by the democratically organised masses. These we can call socialist revolutions. Such revolutions are not started by revolutionary activists. They break out when deep-rooted social crises prompt the ruled to resist in ways that make it impossible for the rulers to carry on as they have. The resistance of the ruled can take many forms, from workplace occupations by wage-earners to street demonstrations by working-class and poor women to uprisings of indigenous people.

Whether growing out of political revolution, anti-imperialist struggle or other kinds of social crises, this type of revolution is distinguished from all others by the masses creating new democratic institutions through which they begin to run society themselves. These are organizations of socialist democracy (sometimes called workers' democracy). They can take many forms, including workplace committees, neighbourhood or community assemblies, and councils of delegates from many such bodies. All of them are mass organizations, meaning that broad layers of people participate in them; they are not organizations of radicals and militants alone.

When masses of people create such democratic institutions of the exploited and oppressed alongside the established state, a situation of dual power emerges. This means that new forms of democracy that express the power of the majority coexist with the capitalist institutions through which a small minority dominates society. Dual power poses the most revolutionary question: which class will run society?

For this reason, a ruling class and its state will do everything they can to co-opt or crush the new forms of democracy. This threat can only be dealt with if the institutions of socialist democracy become supreme and suppress capitalist power in state and society. This can open the way to the long process of building a self-managed, ecologically-sustainable society that is free of the sway of capital.

REVOLUTIONARY BREAKTHROUGHS

The first experience of socialist democracy was the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871. The working people of that city rose up and took power into their own hands through a radically-democratic government of recallable delegates for two months before they were crushed by force of arms. The Commune made possi-

ble a breakthrough in socialist theory and strategy because it showed that, as Karl Marx wrote, “the working class cannot simply lay hold on the ready-made state-machinery and wield it for their own purpose. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation.” Marx recognized the importance of the Commune, hailing its grassroots democracy as “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour.”

Since then, dual power has arisen on a number of occasions. In Russia in 1905 and again on a larger scale in 1917, workers and peasants set up new democratic institutions including councils (called soviets), factory committees, and committees of rank and file soldiers and sailors. These formed the basis of the workers’ and peasants’ power that was established in 1917 but eventually succumbed to bureaucratic counter-revolution from within. The revolution in Germany in 1918-1919 also saw councils of workers and soldiers established. There the reformist Social Democrats and union officials remained the leadership of most of the workers’ movement and were able to channel the council movement into an accommodation with the capitalist parliamentary state. In Spain in 1936-37, dual power existed in Catalonia but lack of decisive revolutionary direction among workers and peasants led to its demobilization and repression by the Popular Front government.

Dual power also existed in the Bolivian Revolution of 1952. Workers’ councils were at the centre of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, crushed by the armed might of the USSR. In 1972-73, Chilean workers set up elected workplace-based committees called cordones, as well as some similar neighbourhood structures. Elements of dual power emerged in Portugal in 1974-75, and in Poland in 1981 before the Solidarity union movement was put down by Stalinist martial law. Dual power existed for a week in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba during the struggle against water privatization there in 2000.

The popular committees and assemblies in France in 1968 and those created in Argentina after the uprising of late 2001 were not mass organizations of workers’ democracy, but they pointed in that direction. In Bolivia, high levels of democratic self-organization have emerged in some indigenous communities and across the city of El Alto during the mass struggles of 2003 and 2005.

These and other experiences don’t give us blueprints for the future. We don’t know what future revolutions will look like. But we can draw some important conclusions from history that help us distinguish between what takes people closer to the establishment of

socialist democracy and what moves in other directions. Two stand out:

ONE: Successful socialist revolutions will involve general strikes run democratically by workers themselves, mass demonstrations and insurrections.

Dual power emerges out of mass strikes and other mobilizations that display high levels of self-organization. For dual power to be resolved in favour of socialist democracy, capitalist state power must be broken.

TWO: A working class that doesn’t democratically control all aspects of society can’t be fully self-governing.

What working people don’t run for themselves will be under the control of others. So if institutions of socialist democracy become the public power governing society but workers don’t democratically run their own workplaces, working-class rule will be incomplete. Similarly, it isn’t enough for workers to occupy their workplaces and take over neighbourhoods: they need to replace capitalist state power with their own organizations of grassroots democracy.

REVOLUTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Some people may more or less agree with this analysis of the history of revolutions, but argue that socialist revolutions aren’t going to happen again. After all, it’s been some years since the self-organization of working people has developed into a situation of genuine dual power. Why should we believe that such revolutions will ever happen again?

The only serious and honest way to answer this is to begin by clearly acknowledging that there are no guarantees. However, we do know that waves of revolutions of various kinds punctuated the 20th century. In recent years, deep social crises leading to massive popular revolts have wracked Indonesia, Ecuador, Argentina, and Bolivia. Class and other social struggles have intensified in many other countries. For instance, the nationalist government of President Hugo Chavez is not anti-capitalist, despite Chavez’s rhetoric, but the mobilizations of the Venezuelan masses against the US-backed anti-Chavez right wing have the potential to grow into a revolution of some kind. Revolution is clearly brewing in Bolivia.

Capitalism continues to produce crises. Millions of people in the “Third World” are being forced off their land and into working for wages. Water and other natural resources necessary to sustain human life are increasingly being turned into commodities that must be purchased. Economic power and naked military aggression are used to further privatization and profitable investment, as in Iraq today. Even in the richest imperialist countries, public services are being sold off and the conditions of work and life are deteriorating for the

majority of people. Everywhere we are told that what is good for capital is good for us, a mantra that increasingly rings hollow for many.

These and other developments that prevent people from meeting their needs can create the conditions for huge mobilizations that shake society and startle complacent rulers. Although we cannot predict what kinds of struggles from below will break out in response to future crises, it would be rash to declare that we will never again see revolutions that will throw up forms of socialist democracy.

Moreover, in the era of capitalist globalization, a situation of dual power will likely be known and discussed internationally with incredible speed. The experiences of its heights of democratic self-organization will be transmitted around the world and fuel discussion among anti-capitalists about how to change the world.

ANTI-CAPITALISM AND REVOLUTION

Among people who consciously reject capitalism, there are many different understandings of how capitalism could be changed or replaced, and what could and should replace it. Many people who don't hesitate to criticize capitalism for its many horrors do not in fact ultimately seek to abolish it but rather seek to regulate or reform it so that its objectionable features are eliminated (or at least held in check). For example, Susan George, an influential figure in the "movement of movements" against neoliberalism and war, argues for "vast injections of crisis-directed resources into the global economy" to promote environmental goals, reduce poverty and promote democracy. Others wish to see global capitalism dismantled in order to build a world of smaller-scale communities.

For supporters of socialist democracy, it is not global interconnectedness that is the problem, but the fact that global relations are organized in capitalist ways. Peasants are forced off their lands to make way for the building of mega-dams and for-profit health care replaces public care because the global economy is capitalist, not because it's global. Changing its scale won't make it any less profit-driven. It is this basic character that also explains why attempts to regulate capitalism cannot fundamentally change it. Mass struggles can wrest progressive reforms from national states and multi-national institutions to assist "Third World" countries, workers, women, indigenous peoples and other oppressed groups, and it is vital to build movements that fight for such reforms. But the rational and humane regulation of capitalism is impossible.

It is for this reason that the goal of anti-capitalists must be the abolition of capitalism, not its regulation or alteration. And it is the kind of social revolution that puts ordinary people themselves in control of society

and sets off "explosions of life" that can open the way towards a society organized around democratic planning, cooperation, liberation from oppression and ecological sustainability. No radical government in the parliament of a capitalist state can open this road through a series of reforms – "onions can be eaten leaf by leaf, but you cannot skin a live tiger claw by claw" (RH Tawney). Nor can a seizure of power by a minority force acting in the name of the majority open the road to a democratic alternative to capitalism.

People who come to understand that capitalism must be replaced if humanity is to have a decent future need to decide if we are willing to make what French Marxist Daniel Bensaid calls "the melancholy wager" that the revolutionary transformation of society is possible. There is no rational basis for proclaiming the inevitability of socialism. We can't have that kind of religious certainty. We don't even have reassurance that the odds are good. We can only look at the stakes and decide if we want to make a wager.

Those of us who decide that there are good reasons for refusing to despair have the responsibility to try to make sure our political activity contributes both to meeting the needs of exploited and oppressed people today and to making future possibilities more likely, even though we cannot be certain about what the future holds. This means patiently organizing in workplaces and communities to build collective resistance to neoliberalism, war and oppression and cultivating an organized current of activists committed to a long-term socialist strategy and the renewal of socialism for the 21st century.

There are good reasons to think that people will again create highly democratic forms of self-organization on a large scale – situations of dual power. But what does it take for such situations to be resolved in favour of socialist democracy? Again, we need to look at history.

REVOLUTION AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The experience of socialist revolutions in the 20th century have demonstrated that it is entirely possible for dual power to emerge, but for the ruling class to prevail. Only in the Russian Revolution of 1917 was the rule of the exploited and oppressed in the form of socialist democracy able to establish itself on more than a local scale with any degree of stability (a process of bureaucratic degeneration began within a year, for reasons that there is no space to explore here).

It's difficult to cut through the thicket of myths, misunderstandings, distortions and lies that have grown up around the Russian Revolution. But the basic picture is this: in Russia, a situation of dual power was resolved in favour of the workers and peasants because there were organized political forces deeply rooted

within the self-organizing and rapidly-radicalizing masses that a) had a clear strategy for victory (“All Power to the Soviets!”), b) were capable of assisting people to draw the conclusion from their own experiences that if they wanted to win their basic demands they had to take power into their own hands, and c) were able to act decisively and take the steps required to break the power of the weakened ruling class in the major cities.

In other words, there was an organized and consciously-revolutionary minority with enough political clarity and influence to provide effective leadership in the situation of dual power. By far the most important of the organizations of revolutionaries (whose numbers grew enormously during the course of 1917) was the Bolshevik Party. In 1917, this party was changed by an influx of radicalized workers. The experience of revolution also proved that the Bolsheviks’ theory about how revolution in Russia would unfold was partly wrong. But the party managed to reorient itself and adopted a strategy of fighting for the replacement of the Provisional Government, created after the overthrow of the monarchy, with the power of workers’ councils. Other revolutionary forces either joined the Bolsheviks or allied with them during the course of 1917.

It’s useful to contrast the Russian experience with the Spanish Revolution of 1936-1937 (wonderfully portrayed in Ken Loach’s film *Land and Freedom*). Many workers and peasants rose up in 1936 in response to a military coup against the newly-elected Popular Front government. Dual power existed in parts of Spain. Many workers and peasants were willing to struggle to defeat fascism and create a new society. Large numbers considered themselves anarchist or Marxist revolutionaries. But most supported the Popular Front of reformist socialists, Stalinist Communists and liberal republicans, soon joined or backed by the leaders of the im-

portant anarcho-syndicalist union CNT and the anti-Stalinist Marxist party POUM. In the name of anti-fascist unity, the Popular Front leadership demanded that there be no anti-capitalist action. This led the Popular Front to demobilize workers’ and peasants’ militias, end factory and land occupations, refuse to grant independence to Spain’s colonies, and ultimately, in 1937, repress the CNT and POUM. By 1939, the fascists had defeated the Popular Front.

There were revolutionaries in Spain who had clearly understood that the Popular Front’s path was disastrous and who recognized that neither the leaders of the anarchist movement nor the POUM were pursuing an alternative strategy for victory. But these clear-sighted radicals (anarchists like the Friends of Durruti group, Trotskyists and the left wing of the POUM) were too few and divided to have much influence. If their forces had been larger and better organized, the outcome of the Spanish Revolution might have been different.

The conclusion that we should draw from these and other revolutions of the past is not that the Russian Revolution is a model that can be copied. Nor is it that the absence of a revolutionary party is the only reason why other revolutions were not victorious. However, the political leadership of influential organizations of socialist activists rooted within mass movements has an indispensable role to play in revolutions. In a situation of dual power, every political current in society will argue about how to resolve the crisis. The consciously-revolutionary minority must have a winning strategy for the establishment of socialist democracy, and be up to the challenge of actively helping to create majority support within the masses for going all the way. The success of future revolutions will depend in part on whether this lesson of the 20th century becomes part of the renewal of anti-capitalist politics in the 21st.★

II. Socialist Activism

Introduction

BY TODD GORDON

SECTION TWO LOOKS AT the challenges to building socialist politics when our ideas aren’t widespread and our organizations are small. This is a crucial issue for socialists today, as our organizations are isolated from broader layers of the working class, revolutionary ideas seem to most people anachronistic (if not reactionary), and, on top of all this, even

reform-minded social movements themselves are extremely weak today. At times like this revolutionaries can feel quite forcefully the pull towards abstentionism from social movements in order to maintain the “purity” of their politics or their organizations, on the one hand, or the pull towards total immersion in movements – orienting to and uncritically placating the poli-

tics of class compromise – without thought to building revolutionary consciousness and organization, on the other.

But, as the different authors in this section argue, it is crucial for socialists to avoid both of these traps. While it is important to be fully aware of the state of the left and the demand this places on socialists in any given period, it is equally important to engage the current context always with an eye to the future and the goals we aspire towards. If we truly believe in the idea and possibility of socialism from below, then revolutionaries must engage with people where they are currently. But we must do so in a way that opens up the possibility that greater numbers of people will become open towards socialist politics. This means we must be involved in on-the-ground movements that aren't revolutionary – and indeed contain a wide spectrum of politics – but which are fighting for reforms, whether it is against imperialist war, for wage gains or to keep a local public library open. Not only can such reforms make a very important difference in peoples' lives, but the struggle for them can transform people involved. People can experience the power of collective mobilization,

witness first hand the repressive nature of the capitalist state, or connect their particular issue to capitalist power relations. None of these things are automatic, of course, and there are forces in social movements that will be working to pacify them, keep them “respectable” and insure they don't meaningfully challenge the status quo – which is why socialists need to be involved in these struggles, promoting democratic organizing and strategies centred on the grass-roots mobilization of people.

Working in coalitions and reform-minded social movements can be tricky, tiring and at times downright frustrating. But it can also potentially be rewarding, both in terms of the concrete victories gained but also for the possibilities it provides to deepen political consciousness. The following articles are aimed to help socialists navigate broader coalition and movement activism. They provide a historical background to key socialist strategies in orienting to reformist movements, explore the difficult dynamics of coalition politics and examine the situation of the left in the Canadian state today.★

Class struggle in the Canadian state

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB

FOR MOST PEOPLE, the daily challenges of work, home, school or other responsibilities mean we don't often stop to try to figure out what's going on in the society in which we live. Committed activists have the same problem, since we're often so busy with meetings and activities of one sort or another, we don't make time for serious thinking about the powerful forces that shape the terrain on which we're active.

The aim of this article is to identify some features of Canadian society today that everyone who believes that this society needs to be changed from the roots (that is to say, radically) needs to understand. If we are serious about radical change, we owe it to ourselves not to shy away from trying to understand the society we're trying to transform. After all, if it's true that people make their own history, we don't make it in circumstances of our own choosing, but in those in which we find ourselves.

What activists do needs to be guided by strategic thinking that starts from an analysis of these conditions of life and struggle.

Today, Canadian society is marked by how successful its ruling class (major employers and other capitalists along with politicians and top state managers) has been over the past quarter-century in putting workers on the defensive, implementing its preferred policies, reorganizing work and labour markets, and defeating Quebecois and aboriginal challenges to “national unity.”

Canada's rulers gradually developed their current right-wing agenda after the end of the unique period of global capitalist expansion and prosperity that lasted from the end of World War Two until the first major post-war recession of 1974-75. In the mid-1970s, Canadian governments and big business – like their counterparts in the US and Western Europe – were confronted with serious problems: falling profits, high inflation, citizens who expected rising wages and better public services, confident unions and high levels of strikes (almost 600,000 workers struck in 1974). In Quebec, the nationalist Parti Quebecois was elected in 1976. Its demand for sovereignty was a response to the national oppression of Quebec and called into question

the federal structure of the Canadian state established in 1867.

RULING CLASS OFFENSIVE

By trial and error, the Canadian ruling class went about trying to restore order. It set out to discipline the working class, defeat Quebec nationalism and create better conditions for investment and profit-making. This was not a conspiracy by unpatriotic Canadian CEOs and politicians to sell out the country to the US, as some Canadian nationalists allege. However, capitalists and politicians did consciously use state institutions as well as associations like the Business Council on National Issues to develop an agenda and press for its implementation.

Labour militancy was the first target. Federal and provincial governments imposed wage controls and frequently used back-to-work legislation to end strikes. The federal government took on and defeated the most militant and radical union, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, and jailed its president. The combined impact of these attacks put the labour movement on the defensive. Working-class confidence gave way to uncertainty and compliance.

In this climate, employers began to reorganize workplaces and jobs to boost profits. Early experiments evolved into extensive work reorganization, often referred to as lean production or Total Quality Management. Workers across the private and public sectors have been subjected to schemes designed to intensify their work and increase management control in the workplace.

There has been a shift away from the norm (never a reality for most women and workers of colour, nor for many white male workers) that paid employment means a full-time, year-round, open-ended job with adequate wages and benefits working for a single employer. The emerging new norm is full-time or part-time fixed-term contract work with few or no benefits, and involves changing employers. As a result of capitalist restructuring, the experience of wage-work today is much more insecure and stressful than it was a generation ago.

Employers' efforts to reorganize workplaces and jobs have both been helped by and have inspired the neo-liberal approach to state policy that gradually came to replace the post-war welfare state model. Neo-liberals believe that state power should be used to strip away barriers to capitalist profit-making. The "free trade" deal with the US in 1988 and then the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 have helped Canadian capital invest and export commodities across the continent. The pace of cuts and neo-liberal "reform" of unemployment insurance and other government programmes increased sharply after the election

of the Liberals under Chretien in 1993. In the name of deficit-cutting, billions of dollars were cut. Less than 40 per cent of the officially unemployed now qualify for Employment Insurance. Poverty and homelessness have risen.

Provincial governments of all stripes have also embraced neo-liberalism. They have implemented workfare and privatized services. Education is being "reformed" (see Alan Sears, "Education for Lean Times," in *New Socialist* 43, Sept-Oct 2003). The role of the federal government in all this has often been obscured, since it's shrunk transfer payments and left it to the provinces to decide what programmes to cut.

The federal system was stabilized by the defeat of the movement for Quebec independence in the 1980 referendum and the adoption of a new Canadian constitution in 1982 without Quebec's consent. Overconfident federalists nearly lost the 1995 Quebec referendum. After that, they wasted no time in going on the offensive against Quebec nationalism, passing the "Clarity Act" that further restricts Quebec's ability to determine its own future. Because the PQ has embraced neo-liberalism and severed the cause of Quebec sovereignty from the social-reform agenda with which it had been associated since the 1960s, it has been unable to revive support for sovereignty.

The very existence of aboriginal land and treaty rights continues to be an obstacle to firms in resource industries and an affront to the widespread racist belief that aboriginal people should have "no special rights" (read: no compensation for centuries of colonial oppression). Unfortunately, the official leaders of most First Nations are, willingly or unwillingly, stuck in drawn-out negotiating processes that can at best produce small gains for aboriginal people. Flare-ups of aboriginal resistance have caused short-term problems for governments and companies and drawn attention to oppression, but haven't built a new aboriginal movement.

So the ruling class has been quite successful in carrying out its agenda. The working-class movement (unions, community-based organizations, and the NDP) was largely unprepared for the attacks that began to rain down in the mid-1970s. It has put up significant resistance, from the one-day pan-Canadian general strike against wage controls in 1976 to the wave of mass protests and political strikes in Ontario from 1995 to 1997 and the December 2003 day of disruption in Quebec. By and large it hasn't been devastated like the US workers' movement. Support in the movement for feminism, anti-racism and lesbian and gay rights has grown stronger. However, activists committed to the kind of militant, democratic, solidarity-building strategy

and tactics needed to win struggles today are few in number and dispersed.

BITTER FRUITS

The mobilizations of other social activist groups, which in the 1990s included the Quebec and pan-Canadian Women's Marches, anti-poverty struggles and many student protests, have kept a spirit of resistance alive. However, they have won few major victories. The global justice movement showed real potential with the Quebec City protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas in 2001, but it hasn't recovered from the demobilization that followed 9-11. The movement against the 2003 war on Iraq reached mass proportions, especially in Quebec, but declined even faster than it rose.

The success of the ruling-class offensive has had important results. Crucially for capitalists, it has boosted corporate profits. According to Marxist economist Fletcher Baragar, the average rate of profit of Canadian business in the 1960s and early 1970s averaged just over 8 per cent. In the 1988-1999 period, it was 6.4 per cent. The average for 1999-2001 was 9.1 per cent. Although these high profit levels may well prove to be short-lived, capital has increased its exploitation of labour, with profitable results.

Capital's victories have had many other effects on the society in which we live. Crucially, they have weakened the working class as a social and political force. Inequality, competition and divisions among working people have deepened. The percentage of workers outside agriculture who are in unions has declined from its peak of 40 per cent in 1983 to around 30 per cent. Many individuals and families have adopted private and individualistic ways of getting by, as seen in support for right-wing tax-cuts. The number of workers who went on strike annually between 1993 and 2002 averaged around only 180,000. Dependency on wage-labour has been reinforced, with more people now forced to hold down more than one job. People of colour, aboriginal people, women and queers are often blamed by members of dominant groups for the difficulties in their lives. All this makes for fertile ground for the "common sense" ideas of neo-liberalism that dominate official politics.

The options represented in official politics have shrunk. Neo-liberalism reigns supreme in all the major parties except the NDP. At best, the NDP calls for more funding for some public services while accepting the parameters of capitalist discipline (such as balanced budgets). No wonder, then, that many people see the parties as basically the same and voter turnouts are falling.

HOPE AND OPPORTUNITIES

At the same time, all this has produced an important minority of people who are thoroughly disgusted by what they see as the "corporate agenda" or "globalization." They understand that public health care is being eroded. They oppose tax cuts that are tied to slashing social services. Some see that women are bearing most of the growing burden of care-giving caused by cutbacks. They have supported nurses' and teachers' strikes, cheered anti-poverty actions and marched against war.

The full potential of this layer is rarely realized. Most unions don't even try to mobilize and educate workers except in limited and controlled ways. The bureaucratic character of unions is a major problem, and traditions of grassroots self-organization are weak. Nor is there a mass political movement or party that clearly expresses the sentiments of this minority, let alone one that argues for radical politics and builds movements.

Among union and social justice activists, there is much disaffection with the NDP (whose roots in the workers' movement were never as deep as those of European social democratic parties). However, no alternative left-wing political formation has been able to establish itself, in part because no political project on the Left today has much credibility. The New Politics Initiative proved incapable of taking advantage of its strong showing at the 2001 federal NDP convention. In Quebec, the future of the Union of Progressive Forces (UFP) is not yet clear.

There are three currents on the broad Left. The one which leads the NDP and most unions basically accepts neo-liberalism and seeks to soften it (sometimes called "social-liberalism"). This sends the message that there is no alternative to austerity and concessions, and has done much to aid the ruling class and discredit labour and the Left.

Another current opposes neo-liberalism more or less consistently. Its spokespeople include the leaders of the Canadian Auto Workers, the Council of Canadians and the UFP. Most activists on the frontlines of everyday workplace and community struggles identify with its politics.

Then there are smaller numbers of anti-capitalists: people who identify with outspoken radicals like Jaggi Singh and John Clarke and who understand that the enemy isn't just neo-liberalism but capitalism itself. Our concentration in the intelligentsia (university students and university-educated workers), lack of organization and disunity help explain the weakness of the anti-capitalist left.

If the analysis outlined here is basically correct, in the next several years we should expect neither social peace nor a rising and spreading wave of struggle and

radicalism, but sporadic flare-ups of resistance. These strikes and protests give us opportunities to strengthen

grassroots self-organization and radical consciousness. Will we be up to the challenge?★

Self-organization

BY DENISE HAMMOND

DEVELOPING A CLEAR POLITIC and raising one's consciousness is central to sustaining a progressive social movement. This process relies in part on the language and terms we use to talk about our activism. This contribution is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of the terminology, but rather an attempt to open dialogue about the term "self-organization."

Loosely explained, self-organization is the actions of a collective of individuals who, sharing a similar politic, outlook and consciousness, work together towards a specific goal or goals. It denotes the self-activity of the oppressed and relies on our own power and strength rather than depending on the benevolence of "leaders."

Self-organization means that the people involved with the issues play a central and primary role in deciding and mobilizing their resistance. For this reason, self-organization is rooted in each individual's experience. Most frequently it happens in response to a direct experience or from an informed consciousness of another's experience. From experience or consciousness, a group of individuals act in solidarity to defend, reclaim or liberate themselves from exploitation or oppressive structures and forms.

Some examples of self-organization are: Gay activists in the 1980s staged "kiss-ins" or "love-ins" at Queen's Park (the provincial legislature) demanding public recognition and rights for same sex couples and the inclusion of sexual orientation into the Ontario Human Rights Code. Queen's University students who in the Winter of 2002 successfully occupied the principal's office, built a community movement, applied public pressure and made it impossible for the Ontario government to force through the deregulation of all educational programs at Queen's. Since the 1970s, groups of women have setup defence lines at abortion clinics to provide security to ensure woman who wanted to exercise their right to an abortion were not harassed or denied entrance by anti-choice, religious zealots. These lines are still active today in Toronto's Cabbage Town. All these examples are different forms of self-organization, but they all demonstrate that self-organization is not the act of one isolated individual

working for change, but a group of people working together for a particular end.

As activists interested in building strongly rooted movements that create change, we must delve further into the meaning of self-organization. The one consistent underlying factor associated with self-organization is collectively working for change in a way that is free from the stifling of bureaucrats and bureaucratic structures. A concrete example of this is the earlier work of CAW flying squads who, independent of their leadership, collectively participated in community actions defending immigrant rights from political, xenophobic clogs in the system. Another example is the mobilization of thousands of activists into affinity groups and their participation in spokes councils to formulate collective, but also autonomous, resistance in Quebec City in 2001.

Self-organization takes place through a loose relationship of networks removed from dominant power structures. This is why self-organization often results in independent structures like rank and file caucuses in unions, affinity groups, flying squads, community defence lines or coalitions that recognize that many of the traditional institutions or bodies are not effective in bringing about change but need to be forced or pushed to do so.

Self-organization is a means of challenging and working free from bureaucratic practices. For this reason, it is often associated with the phrase "socialism from below." Both emphasize grassroots forms of organizing developed by the oppressed and exploited against oppressive social and economic structures and that rely on their own power and activity rather than depending on a small group of "leaders," the state or parliamentarians. In this model of organizing, all individuals play a role and multiple voices are integrated. People have collective ownership over their actions.

People are politicized through self-organization, in part because of the actions they must take in order to push forward the demands of their struggle. Forms of direct activism, embodying a diversity of tactics and actions, must be enacted to ensure that the struggle and development of a self-organized group transpires into

more than another bureaucratic layer in the movement. Through different forms of direct action, activist can develop a radical consciousness and become aware of their power.

Action oriented self-organization enables people to make gains on their terms rather than negotiating and settling for what the exploiter (the employer, the state, police, the corporate capitalist) hand out. But, it is important to remember that direct engagement and discussion with others is a necessary piece of the puzzle prior to acting to avoid replicating top-down strategies.

A prerequisite for self-organizing is rank-and-file or community activists talking to others “where they are at” – focusing on common struggles and grievances. Along with establishing direct relationships and building a network based on trust, at the heart of self-organization is democratic transparency. This means that meetings are open, inclusive and accessible; educational materials are be accessible (for example, available in different languages) and distributed to everyone to keep them informed; teach-ins, and other actions are directed at building skills and relationships based on common awareness; and decision making practices are informed by an anti-oppression framework.

An explicit emphasis on building an open democratic framework is critical. Without building a group identity, or a dynamic that has an organizational foundation different from that which reinforces hierarchical structures, the struggles and gains of those self-organizing can not develop a sustained movement of resistance that effectively moves to challenge the bigger picture of global capitalism and entrenched systems of oppression. Furthermore, for self-organization to become a catalyst for sustained resistance, it must translate into more than ungrounded, single efforts of pushing bureaucrats to pass motions of endorsement.

Although rank and file unionists are often centrally placed in the discussion of self-organization, primarily because union workers have a base to organize from, a common setting of struggle and a familiarity, it is essential that we challenge the notion that only workers can experience and engage in a process of self-organization. Public and private unions in Canada and Quebec report that only 30% of the working force is unionized. This means a majority of workers are left without a central in which to organize. Further, considering the economic downturn, increased job loss and contractual work, insecure work conditions and changes to employment standards, unionized workers are increasingly placed in vulnerable positions.

Such fragility also results from today’s over-bureaucratization of work, culture, organization and decision-making. This is then exacerbated by worker

fragmentation, racism and the lack of community within the workplace. Combined, these factors serve to work against the building of a layer of activists that understand and push for self-organization within currents of the working class. The Days of Action in Ontario are a prime example of how the momentum of workers and movement building has been quashed by the labour leaderships’ bureaucratic reliance on electoral politics, rather than collective action, for winning social change.

Many struggles in history have also failed because, in practice, they have tolerated and accepted covert and overt forms of racism, sexism and homophobia (progressive language in collective agreements, by-laws and hiring procedures aside). Making the link between class exploitation and racism and sexism and homophobia is essential in order for self-organization to move beyond recreating hierarchical forms of organization. It is also crucial in order to ensure that the practices of the exploiters and oppressors are not entrenched systemically in our organizing. Instead of merely focusing on the exploitation between employer and employee, effective self-organization must challenge all oppressions facing members.

We should remember and celebrate the victories, big and small, that are won through self-organization. The CUPE 3903 strike at York University in Toronto was a bold and successful attempt to challenge bureaucratic bargaining and picket line tactics. Even though similar battles remain, much ground has been gained. In particular, we have seen an increased radicalization and heightened consciousness. The rank-and-file resistance of workers – unionized and non-unionized – has translated into labour flying squads and independent caucuses that have empowered workers to physically and metaphorically walk away from bureaucratic models of leadership, most notably by turning towards the fence in Quebec City.

Developing a common understanding of the meaning and importance of self-organization is necessary for activists to imagine the multiplicity of means through which we can resist global capitalism and the multiple social oppressions that accompany it. This struggle can start with challenging labour bureaucracy, fighting for subsidized day care, attending the prom with your same sex partner in a Catholic school or fighting to protect immigrants and refugees from deportation pushed by racist systems of state terror. As a starting point for generating this “activist imagination,” we must first engage in the discussion on the significance of self-organizing as a necessary and fundamental principle for “breaking it down” – the “it” and how depends on you!★

The dilemma of coalition politics: Ups & downs of collective work

BY DENISE HAMMOND

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE inspiring mass mobilization after the Bush administration declared its war on Iraq over? Two of the main reasons for the decline of the anti-war movement are that individuals no longer feel actively empowered and engaged with the issues; and, although many people were radicalizing in the anti-war and peace movements, many such coalitions did not connect imperialist invasion with occupation. The momentum of the “peace” movement became unsustainable just as a new, more subtle US war was beginning.

This is the dilemma of being involved with coalitions that aim only to build mass mobilizations instead of carrying forward political consciousness. Radicals have a vital role to play inside coalitions—developing and deepening the political undercurrent and building a broader movement. To build strong and sustainable grassroots movements that breakdown power and privilege, we must understand the role and function of coalition work. First, in order to build progressive movements upon socialist principles, all coalition work must be rooted in and foster a politics of anti-oppression, democracy, empowerment and engagement.

Coalitions can be an effective tool for producing mass mobilizations because they can bring together diverse groups for a common cause. They allow activists to set aside differences to accomplish a strategic objective. However, when coalition organizers limit their expectations to merely influencing an immediate condition (i.e. ending a military invasion), they limit the revolutionary potential of their organizing by isolating the issues and quashing creative impulses.

During the recent mass anti-war mobilizations across Canada, many individuals radicalized and looked for spaces to develop anti-imperialist politics. Unfortunately, many were confronted with bureaucratic decision-making and frustrated by power politics. When this kind of power hold occurs, the coalition can become rigid and inflexible, thus disempowering people while forcing them to march under a monolithic banner that lacks creativity and political engagement. Coalitions that build collective empowering actions can live beyond their immediate demands. The reality is that while numbers may bring media attention, numbers

alone cannot build a movement capable of long-term revolutionary change.

CREATE UNITY, DON'T ASSUME IT

A common dilemma of coalition politics is in picking a starting point that allows for unity, rather than presupposing it. Coalitions are frequently made of individuals coming from a broad range of backgrounds – including liberal idealism, faith groups, labour unions and populist organizations – as well as random activists united by a particular concern. Some coalition members will have limitations on what they can sign on to. For this reason, radicals often view coalitions as containing the politics of the lowest common denominator. But this dismissive perspective is limiting.

An explicit recognition of the exploitative nature of capitalism or imperialism will not necessarily transcend into revolutionary action. In addition, internal debate over the basis of unity can disorganize coalition work. Such debates easily degenerate into arguments over words and abstract political positions that won't necessarily become visible to the public.

Many radicals fail to recognize that praxis is far more important than language, because education is best when it happens through action. In many cases, the debate over language is merely academic posturing. Like more liberal idealist organizers who employ coalition work merely to mobilize for a single purpose, radicals who make the “maximum program” a precondition for partnership can severely limit the movement building potential of coalition work.

Radicals should not to impose a false dichotomy upon coalition work, that they are either revolutionary vehicles or reformist ones. Social change has never been that simple. In fact, radicals need to learn how to negotiate a transitional common ground and how to reinforce the revolutionary potential from every circumstance.

To move forward, radicals need a common ground with activists while continuing to advance an uncompromising political analysis. Coalitions must be founded upon genuine respect for diversity of perspective and tactics. Radicals should not impose their politics, but instead, through participation in decision-making, broaden the analysis and politics of coalition members. To do so, radicals must make allies, intro-

duce new debate and bring related issues into the discussion.

By making connections between immediate crises and capitalist power relations, radicals may inject a broader politic into emerging social movements. By starting where others are at and extending the analysis, radicals can spark activists who might not otherwise radicalize. In this way, we can transform concern for particular conditions (like war or free trade) into a desire to change broader power relations (like racist imperialism and global capitalism). But, this perspective must be put forward in a way that is clear, principled and not condescending.

THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION

Building a movement means accepting that people have different experiences and different levels of political consciousness. Many newly radicalized people need to develop their politics in their own way – so it is vital that radicals have patience. All of us are learning, and all of us need to accept that political education is a continuum. Working with others who have diverging perspectives can help to develop our own politics. Through coalition discussions over tactics or demands, we can deepen the revolutionary consciousness of ourselves and others.

Solidarity is a central requirement of any revolutionary movement. Since coalitions merge people and organizations that may not normally work together, they may also build local solidarity through participation beyond “typical” white left-wing venues. It is too easy to stay within our comfort zones and to limit our organizing to communities that share a common politic and a style of organizing. Isolationism and fragmentation are the enemies of collective strength and only serve the interests of the status quo. Consensus on how to accomplish social change can only emerge from genuine solidarity and inclusion.

BUILDING MOVEMENTS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

During the earlier days of Toronto Mobilization for Global Justice (Mob4Glob), the coalition operated with a broad sense of solidarity against global corporate greed and free trade but without an anti-capitalist principle in the basis of unity. A broad unity perspective allowed the coalition to bring together faith-based groups, trade unions, student organizations, affinity groups and NGOs under a banner of fighting globalization and free trade. The coalition enabled students, like myself, to tap into the resources of coalition partners. Equally important were the relationships that developed from coalition work with trade unionists, teachers and other community members. Such relation-

ships formed from our work (not words) – from rallies to popular education to public forums – and provided a venue for activists to extend our political work outside the coalition.

These relationships helped to develop impressive solidarity work at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April 2001 and beyond. For example, many Mob4Glob radicals were later able to draw upon coalition connections to help solidify relationships between community members and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty in the formation of the Ontario Common Front (OCF) against the Harris Government of Ontario in the summer of 2001. While direct action was never a Mob4Glob tactic, it was a central OCF tool and many groups who would not have previously endorsed the tactic now had the confidence to participate in more radical mobilizing. Many radicals within Mob4Glob had built sufficient rapport with other coalition members to deepen the politics of anti-globalization activists.

LEADERSHIP VS. CONTROL

Unfortunately, Mob4Glob came to a stand-still when political differences became insurmountable. Over time, the coalition was plagued with power politics and individuals seeking to set the direction of the group. This same tendency towards top-down organizing recently played a role in the demise of a number of anti-war coalitions – at least in Toronto.

If building a movement is a goal of coalition work, then organizers must realize that collective strength and longevity are established through shared ownership over the coalition and the coalition’s work. The backbone of any social movement is a matrix of evolving social relationships. Therefore, coalitions must enable all participants to be active players in all aspects of coalition work – from decision-making to outreach to public representation. Only when the self-identified “leadership” facilitates collective control will coalitions model the representative, inclusive, democratic and grassroots values that socialists seek. But opening coalitions beyond the vision of their “founders and leaders” is a difficult task that only activists with a long-term perspective can tackle.

Coalitions are vital in creating revolutionary change because they can help to position radicals in new circles. Equally important, activists need to find ways to work together and bring forward the revolutionary potential of the group. If we simply rely on building as an end in itself, then superficial politics and unsustainable numbers will – at the end of the day – be the only result.★

The united front tactic

BY PAUL LE BLANC

FOR SERIOUS AND EFFECTIVE activism, it is necessary to analyse the specific reality of which we are a part, and on the basis of this to develop a strategic orientation of how to get from our current reality to our goal. Such strategies must involve the use of flexible tactics suitable for complex and shifting realities.

One of the most important tactics for revolutionary socialists is that of the united front. As the name implies, it is designed to create unity among diverse forces in order to achieve a common goal. Workers in a factory, students on a campus and people in a community might have different outlooks and affiliations – some might be liberals, some more conservative, some socialists, some religious, some not religious, etc., with different views on many things – but all might be opposed to a wage cut in the factory, a tuition hike on the campus, the elimination of services to a community. Or perhaps many people from all of these places might be opposed to a military dictatorship or to racist policies or to a war being initiated by pro-capitalist politicians. Whatever the specific struggle, they would “agree to disagree” on many things in order to stand together and struggle effectively around the issue or issues of common concern. Through such united fronts majorities are forged that are capable of winning victories.

In fact, the failure to form a united front – the primary example being the refusal during the early 1930s of the massive Social-Democratic and Communist parties in Germany to join together for the purpose of confronting and smashing the Nazi upsurge – can result in disaster.

There have been important and effective united front efforts that have had an impact on history, winning victories for the working class through union struggles, through the women’s rights movement, through anti-racist struggles, through lesbian and gay rights struggles, through anti-war and anti-imperialist struggles, and international solidarity struggles. Effective struggles against the powers-that-be not only improve the lives of masses of people, but they can powerfully stimulate the critical thinking and imaginations, and radicalise the consciousness, of many thousands and eventually millions of people. Powerful protests against IMF/WTO/World Bank “globalisation” have been made possible through united fronts. For many activists, the concept of “united front” means the same

as the word “coalition”, which are essential for effective protests and serious politics.

But the united front tactic, as developed by revolutionary Marxists such as Lenin and Trotsky (especially in the earliest years of the Communist International, the world-wide movement of revolutionary socialists set up after the Russian Revolution), also has another very important aspect involving not simply co-operation but also competition between groups in the united front. In many cases, workers or others who are engaged in a common struggle belong to different organisations. In a united front these different groups maintain their specific identities and their divergent outlooks but agree to “march separately but strike together”. They would be free to disagree with each other and to criticise each other while at the same time working together. The members of each group and other people in the united front would have an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the various groups who were joined in the common struggle.

Some political organisations – such as social democratic parties – argue that the gradual accumulation of reforms combined with many far-reaching compromises with capitalist employers will solve all problems. The leaders of such parties might hope to increase their own influence and authority through the united front struggle. Other activists might belong to a revolutionary socialist party, believing that the working class and all oppressed people must rely on their own independent strength to push back and finally overthrow capitalist injustice, replacing it with a socialist democracy. The revolutionaries on the other hand would want to use the united front to help persuade an increasing number of workers that it is militant struggle and revolutionary change and not reformist compromises that will give them the power to advance their interests. By arguing their views persuasively while most effectively building the struggle, the revolutionaries would win more and more influence among all workers.

There has been, however, a very different use of the coalition concept. In fact, the most influential strategies in the labour movement over the years have been marked by class collaboration. This involves a far-reaching form of co-operation between workers and capitalists that dilutes or even rejects the notion of class conflict and is generally based on an acceptance of capitalism. The “business unionism” so influential in the U.S. labour movement is a primary example. A

number of reformist-oriented socialists believing that the evils of capitalism could be gradually reformed out of existence who have ended up in a similar place.

From the mid-1930s onward, Communist parties – with somewhat different motivations – had a similar class-collaborationist orientation. In 1935 the world Communist movement, headed by Stalin, advanced a strategy of the popular front. This movement believed that the choice facing workers was not between capitalism and socialism, but instead, in the words of Communist leader Georgi Dimitrov, “between bourgeois democracy [that is, capitalist democracy] and fascism.” The primary goal of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union was to establish friendly and peaceful relations with liberal capitalist governments, and in various countries to help create such governments.

The popular front is not simply a tactical alternative to the united front; it represents a completely different strategy for effecting social change. Instead of being designed to bring the working class to power, it is designed to mobilise working-class support for far-reaching coalitions with liberal capitalist parties and reform-minded but explicitly pro-capitalist governments. The primary difference between the Commu-

nists and the moderate reform-socialists was that the former were against the foreign policy of Cold War anti-Communism and the latter were in favour of that policy. Now that the Cold War is over and the world Communist movement is only a memory, both the social democratic and the Stalinist traditions tend to merge into a shared political orientation. Often people influenced by these traditions attempt to steer coalitions into far-reaching collaboration with “progressive” pro-capitalist political forces.

In contrast to this, revolutionary socialists have insisted that there is a fundamental difference between the united front tactic and the strategy of class collaboration represented by the popular front. The strategy of revolutionary Marxism calls for the working class to lead struggles for greater democracy, for economic reforms, and to oppose war and militarism in a manner that increases its power, influence, and political independence. As the working class successfully organises and struggles along these lines, it will be able “to win the battle of democracy” (as Marx and Engels put it) by taking political power and by initiating a socialist reconstruction of society. The united front tactic is designed to help advance this strategy.★

Anti-war organizing and fighting racism and white supremacy

NEW SOCIALIST MAGAZINE

AROUND THE WORLD AND across the Canadian State a vibrant, new anti-war movement is emerging in opposition to Bush’s and Blair’s plan to attack Iraq. This movement is broad ranging and diverse but if it is to be able to challenge the root cause of this war mobilisation it must centrally challenge racism and imperialism.

The war mobilisation is being used to foment hatred and discrimination against people of Muslim and Arab backgrounds and other people of colour around the world. The “enemy” is characterised as people of Arab and Muslim descent, whose lives are being devalued in order to justify killing them in the impending war. On the domestic front the tightening up of border restrictions for people of colour and the mobilisation of “national security” concerns against people of colour are central aspects of the “war on terrorism.” Effective anti-war organising must be solidly based on anti-racist

principles and practice. These are questions that cannot be avoided.

Racism is not simply sustained by a “system” out there but also through the daily social practices many white people engage in. For people who identify as or are identified as being white, anti-racism cannot simply mean opposing racial discrimination and prejudice against “others” or doing “good deeds” for people of colour.

An anti-racist politics of responsibility must be based on white people taking responsibility for addressing the personal and broader social practices of white privilege ranging from challenging racist jokes and remarks to challenging the racist practices of the police and immigration officers.

The social making of whiteness gives those who can successfully claim to be white real social, material, psychological and political privileges over people of colour and First Nations people. These privileges are not

rooted in the biology of the colour of white people's skin but in the social and historical practices of white privilege. For instance, the racial division of labour within the Canadian State has been created through racist immigration and social policies as well as through the definition of Canada as a "white" country. "White" jobs generally are paid better and are more socially privileged than the types of work reserved for people of colour and First Nations people. Furthermore, the very definition of Canada as a "white" country rests on a history of colonial violence directed against the First Nations. This is central to the making of the Canadian State and to the very self-definition of "Canadianness." An anti-racist politics of responsibility, therefore, means that white people must challenge the very understanding of "race", including most centrally the ways in which "whiteness" is constructed as the "norm" in Canadian society. A familiarity with the ways in which "race" has been socially and historically constructed will be a crucial tool in anti-racist and anti-war activism.

The editors of *New Socialist* are not trying to encourage white guilt since this leads to immobilisation instead of to critical consciousness and action. Rather, we point to the impossibility of being "non-racist" in a racist and white-dominated country and world. White people need to recognise how they participate in reinforcing and producing racism and white supremacy. Racism is as much about white people as it is about people of colour. As such, white people need not only to support the anti-racist struggles of people of colour and the First Nations but also to work with other white people to dismantle our own individual and collective white privilege.

This is often difficult for white activists to see, since white domination fosters the view that whiteness is the norm while "race" is taken to refer only to "others".

The social making of whiteness becomes so taken-for-granted and "common-sense" that it becomes hard to see "whiteness" existing at all let alone as a socially constructed identity and concept much as blackness, "brownness" and so on. It is the social making of whiteness in the centre that sets these other racialising categories in motion. Whiteness is defined against notions of blackness and each exists in a historical and social relation to each other. Importantly, this relation intersects with and is organised through relations of class, gender, sexuality, and ability as well. The struggle against "race" and racism will thus succeed only by tackling all of these relations simultaneously.

To challenge white domination and the construction of whiteness reframes the anti-racist agenda for the radical left in profound ways. In trying to deepen discussion on the left about white supremacy and fighting racism, *New Socialist* is initiating an ongoing discussion and debate on these crucial issues. We want to clarify how central these questions are to remaking a socialism from below that challenges all forms of exploitation and oppression in the social and historical conditions we face. In this issue, we begin the discussion with a piece by Tom Keefer on the historical connection and interdependency between the development of capitalism and white domination during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We invite contributions from readers – from individuals and groups – in subsequent issues. We hope this discussion will be thorough and wide-ranging – so please join in!

This discussion is not only about developing a better analysis of white supremacy and racism, which is badly needed on the radical left. It is also about developing a better practice for changing the world as we build movements against war, racism, and imperialism as part of the struggle for socialism from below.★

Socialism from below and social movements

BY JANIS KALETA AND T.J. BAKER

SOcialism from below holds that human emancipation can only be achieved by the self-activity of those who experience exploitation and oppression. As socialists, we reject the idea that emancipation can ever result from the benevolence of a small group that grants others their rights and freedoms. We recognize that, in a capitalist society, particular sections of society hold power by enforcing and

defending their interests. In other words, power respects power and concedes nothing without a struggle.

Because we see the world this way, we do not try to appeal to the morality or reasonableness of those in positions of power, hoping that they will give up their privileges voluntarily. Instead, we try to help organize opposition to inequality by those who shoulder its burden. Socialists understand oppression and exploitation as intrinsic to capitalism as a system. As a result, we try

to link opposition struggles to one another, drawing connections and forging alliances between the issues, insights and struggles of different movements: anti-racism, the women's movement, the labour movement, and so on.

This general perspective helps to shape the way we participate in social movements. We believe that these movements while often not explicitly revolutionary or anti-capitalist, are still extremely important and valuable. They are examples of the self-activity needed as a basis for a socialist mass movement. They are a means for activists to develop their politics and ideas. Finally, these movements can win real gains and reforms, improving people's lives and often leading to further struggles and gains. Social struggles and movements and struggles are certain to be a central element in any mass movement against capitalism and the oppression that goes on within it.

Thus our socialist activism involves a serious commitment to becoming a part of these movements and to building them for their own sake. For socialists to be relevant, they need to gain the experience of participating in struggles that are broader than their own organizations. Just as we hope to transform the movements into a revolutionary force, we hope also that our experiences in the movements will transform ourselves and our politics.

The success of these struggles depends upon the ability of those involved to develop their confidence and their own sense of collective power. This confidence encourages grassroots activism and initiative, independent of official leadership structures.

Successful activism requires a commitment to broad-based collective action and democracy. Organi-

zations can only accommodate rank and file initiative and direction if they are thoroughly democratic. Therefore, we promote democratic organization that allows for the full participation of every member, and we resist all forms of elitism, be it bureaucratic methods or top-down leadership strategies.

Similarly we promote collective action, instead of initiatives depending on the actions of a small number of 'militants.' Individuals can gain confidence to exert social influence and actually change the world when they struggle as part of a larger collective. This challenges demoralization, and the idea that "there is no alternative" to capitalism. Collective struggle can produce changes in consciousness, fostering an environment where socialist ideas are relevant.

As socialist activists, we want to link the struggles of different groups over different issues. In promoting collective struggles, we show how seemingly different agendas are related. All activists gain by overcoming isolation and weakness and by communicating the experiences of each struggle to one another.

As socialists with an understanding of how capitalism works, we are ideally situated to raise ideas for linking struggles. For example, we understand that poverty is related to racial oppression and that anti-poverty activists should fight racism and work with anti-racist activists. And we can show that labour and environmental activists have bases for common work, since environmental degradation compromises the health and safety of workers. Making these links challenges the divisions that are exploited by the ruling class, while helping to build a movement against capitalism.★

III. Socialist Organizing

Introduction

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB

HOW SHOULD PEOPLE WHO share a socialism from below perspective and agree about the need to be constructive activists in today's struggles organize themselves? That's the question tackled in the final section of this pamphlet.

In the Canadian context, most radicals don't belong to any political organization. So do socialists need their own organization, in addition to being part of unions, community organizations and campus groups? If socialists are serious about being as effective as possible

in doing what we need to be doing today, then clearly we need to work together. That means socialist organization.

Despite what some socialists still think, there is no universal model for socialist organizing. The ways socialists organize ourselves today should be guided by how we understand three things: the struggle for socialism (see "The History of Revolution and the Future of Anti-Capitalism" and other articles in the first section of this pamphlet), what the priorities of socialists in

today's situation should be, and what ways of organizing are most effective in helping us to work on these priorities.

None of the articles in this section pretend to offer the last word about socialist organization. Nor do they represent a collective evaluation of what NSG members have learned about socialist organization since the NSG was formed in 1996 (for example, about women organizing autonomously within the organization as part of building a feminist socialist group of women and men).

What the articles here all share is a rejection of the model of organization that has, unfortunately, been dominant on the far left, the approach that "What Kind

of Socialist Organization?" (part of a document adopted in principle when the NSG was formed) calls sectism. There is a sad history of sincere radicals committing much time and effort to organizations whose members (or at least their leaders) act as if their group – rather than the struggles of workers and oppressed people – is the centre of the struggle against capitalism.

Rejecting this sectism, the articles outline an approach to building what one of the writers calls "a lively, active, democratic current of socialists who are facing up to the real challenges we need to confront without giving up on the idea of organizing for socialism."★

What's so new about new socialism?

BY ALAN SEARS

THE MAGAZINE YOU ARE reading and the socialist organization that publishes it are less than a year old. The launching of a new socialist organization in 1996 might seem odd to many people. After all, people aren't exactly flooding into socialist groups these days. In fact, there are probably fewer organized socialists in Canada today than at any other time in the 20th century. But there are plenty of little socialist groups.

And then there's that name, "New Socialist." Corporate capitalism has made people quite rightly cynical about that "new" label. We all know that "new and improved" usually means the same old crap packaged to be more profitable (yes, they make a lot more profit on those handy little boxes of "ultra" detergent than they did on the old big boxes). The New Socialists came on the scene right around the same time as the telephone company was relaunching itself as the "New Bell." So what's New?

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Once upon a time there was a protest song by a guy named Bob Dylan. Then the big, bad Bank of Montreal took that song (well, bought it really – they are probably paying royalties) to use in their campaign. Can a bank change? Not really, of course, except that their record profits show that they have found new ways of squeezing money out of us (using new technologies like bank machines to lay off tellers and hire cheaper labour in industrial-style data processing centres). And just wait for those mortgage-style income-contingent student loans ...

But the transformation of yesterday's protest song into today's corporate jingle (for a bank, yet) is a sign of the times. The 1960s and early 1970s saw a massive wave of protest sweep across much of the world: demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, strikes and labour militancy, women's liberation, the Black Power movement, Québécois nationalism, student activism, lesbian and gay liberation, environmentalist activism. Many people became socialists in that period. Socialist ideas of militancy, mass action and workers power from below seemed to fit in a period when radical struggles were on the upsurge.

Through the later 1970s and the 1980s that wave of struggle was stopped. Now, it is the other side that is on the attack. Employers demand concessions, so that many of the strikes we see are defensive (trying to protect at least some of what we've won) rather than offensive (seeking improvements). Governments of every stripe have taken up the corporate agenda and are trying to drive down working class living standards, destroy social programs and weaken the labour movement.

So, here's a contradiction. The Metro Days of Action in Toronto will probably produce a bigger demonstration than any we saw even during the big upsurge the 1960s and 1970s. But the climate is different. There is a lot of demoralization on our side. There is not much indication of rank and file independence in the labour movement; things are pretty much coming from the top down. The grassroots movements (women, lesbian and gay, anti-poverty, anti-racism) usually have

a hard time mobilizing beyond a relatively small core of really committed types. This could change, but for that to happen we need to see a new kind of grassroots mobilizing (in the unions and in the movements) to take this protest beyond a single week.

So, banks are singing protest songs about changin' times and those of us who want to change the world are feeling a bit sick to our stomachs. Actually, a lot of people probably think we're a bit sick in the head, too. So, what's New?

BACK TO THE FUTURE?

The difference between the New Socialists and the "old" ones comes down to something pretty simple. We admit that the times really are changin' and that socialists don't have all the answers. A lot of existing socialist groups use socialist theory as a set of blinkers to keep themselves from being distracted and confused by events in the real world around them. The blinkers help them keep trudging along the road that leads forward to ...1917.

The problem is that 1917 won't happen again. Certainly, the Russian revolution of that year was of crucial importance. For the first time, a working class took power, developing new forms of democratic and collective self-rule called "soviets" or workers' councils. There is a lot to be learned from that experience. But it is a bit much to believe that we can use a map of Russia in 1917 to find our way around Canada at the end of the 20th century.

The problem is that capitalism is a dynamic system. Yes, it has certain built-in features, like capitalists exploiting workers. And a lot of trendy theorists who call themselves post-something or other ignore that. But, many "old" socialists make the opposite error and underestimate the importance of the changes that actually have occurred. The years since 1917 have seen changes like: the welfare state, the bureaucratized trade union movement, mass social democratic parties that alternate in and out of government office, lean production, environmentalism, globalization and the challenges of feminism, lesbian/gay liberation and anti-racist organizing.

These changes matter. They shape the ground we are fighting on and have a big impact on the consciousness of workers. The challenge for socialists is to get the balance right in assessing how capitalism changes in order to maintain its system of exploitation. But for most socialists, the balance has not been right. It's time to renew socialism to keep pace with changes in capitalism and developments in the movements for freedom.

WHAT'S MY LINE?

Socialist renewal requires a different kind of socialist organization. It must be a grouping of independent thinkers and activists who agree to work together to be effective. Too often, socialist groups have emphasized the development of a leadership that comes up with a "line" and a membership which learns it and follows it.

The New Socialists need to be something different. We need a lively and democratic tradition of exchange and debate. Members will have different perspectives on socialist politics depending on where they are active. A CAW member who works at Chrysler's might have a different sense of what is possible than an OPSEU worker in an Ontario government office. The Chrysler workers won real gains in their contract without striking, while OPSEU workers limited their losses after a bitter five week strike. Socialist theory and practice can only develop through interchanges based on real experience.

What's-my-line socialism often serves to insulate members from pulls in the real world. Members are always being warned against "adapting" to the environment wherever they are active. They therefore remain alien, involved in snatch-and-raid missions to seize a few recruits and beam back to the mothership.

It is a real challenge for socialists to navigate the path between adapting to their milieu and remaining alien. It means being able to think on your feet and learn from those around you, while at the same time applying socialist politics to make arguments about the way forward. It requires a really difficult balance: one the one hand, modesty and open-endedness; on the other hand, audacity and principle. A socialist organization has to help develop the skills of its members to find their own way through this tangle.

This means that every member has to be an activist. Of course, we have to recognize that there are different ways of being a socialist. The rhythm of political activity is different on a university campus, in a union or in a social justice coalition. The demands on our time vary if we are a parent, or work full-time or juggle part-time and school work. But everyone needs to find some area of work in which they can engage with others trying to change the world. They need to be influenced by the world at the same time as they try to change it.

So the New Socialists need to be an organization of activists. At the same time, every member has to be a theorist. No, this does not mean that everyone has to be philosopher who is comfortable with heavy books. But a socialist needs to be able to use ideas creatively to understand the world and try to change it. We need to be able to think critically, to take the best from socialist traditions and to learn from others who have something to say about the struggles of the day. Only on a group based on freewheeling exchange of ideas com-

bined with an ongoing commitment to activism can hope to become a grouping of independent thinkers and activists.

THE BIG PICTURE

Okay, why bother? Maybe the best way to develop independent thinkers and activists is to totally get rid of the idea of organization. Michael Moore, who made the movie *Roger and Me* and the television series *TV Nation*, certainly criticizes the left for responding to every issue by calling yet another meeting. Many younger radicals are influenced by anarchist ideas and their rejection of conformist organizations which encourage dogmatism and stifle creative expression. So, can this group be different?

That is the challenge. But it is worth trying. Why? A socialist organization provides a framework in which we can understand specific struggles in the context of the big picture. To get the big picture, we need to learn from the past and attempt a global view of the present. Lessons from the past are crucial in understanding what radicalization really feels like, when masses of people are really interested in politics and have the confidence and organization to fight. The global view of the present means trying to relate struggles to an overall understanding of how the system works and how to build the power to change it.

In particular, the global view of struggles means challenging the view held by many socialists that working class unity is an automatic process hindered only by bad leadership which has caused divisions and imposed conservatizing frameworks. In contrast, we have to argue that solidarity is something that must be fought for, challenging the divisions based on sectionalism (seeing the whole struggle through the lens of your own immediate circumstances), employment or unemployment, age, gender, race or ethnicity, sexuality and so on. This means paying attention to the complex and contradictory interests that workers might have in a particular situation, for example why a relatively well-paid employed worker might feel he or she had an interest in welfare-bashing and getting a tax cut.

Now, there's no way a tiny group of socialists can really attain a global view of struggles. That is part of

the reason that modesty has to be part of the equation. But we can work in that direction, always being pulled by a tension between really rich understandings of specific struggles and a general overview of the system as a whole.

JUST ADD LENIN AND STIR

Wait, this is all a bit fuzzy still. I've mentioned some of the ingredients of a New Socialism – but what about the recipe? Well, that is the problem (and also the opportunity). The recipes out there keep cooking up the same old thing: stale groups with the what's-my-line approach

Now, this doesn't mean we don't try to figure out what to do next. Some things are clear. We need to be engaged with others, both in debate around socialist ideas and in action to build the fightback. There are particular opportunities on university campuses for discussing socialist ideas with new layers of people. It is an important moment in the struggle against Harris to try to get stuck in to build the grassroots movement that can sustain this fightback. We need new partnerships with others on the left, who might not be interested in joining this organization but have a lot to offer in terms of experience or insight.

The key thing is that we need to be building a lively, active, democratic current of socialists who are facing up to the real challenges we confront without giving up on the idea of organizing for socialism.

So, what do you think? Does this New Socialist project make sense? If so, you can help. We need your unique perspective and experiences. Some people might want to join and participate directly in the NS project for socialist renewal. Others might subscribe to this magazine, or take a small order every issue for distribution to friends and coworkers, or via a local bookstore. Still others might come to our conferences or write a letter in response to this (or any other) article.

But if you find yourself in significant agreement with the project of socialist renewal on which we've embarked, we invite you to contribute in whatever way you can.★

For revolutionary pluralism!

NEW SOCIALIST MAGAZINE

HOW CAN SOCIALISM BE renewed? Since the first issue of NEW SOCIALIST in early 1996, this question has been on the minds of those of us who produce this magazine. The fall of the so-called “Communist” dictatorships almost a decade ago and the collapse of Communist parties around the world has led many socialists and radicals to accept the triumphant claim of free market ideologues that capitalism is the only way society can be organized. The 1990s have seen the NDP and other social democratic parties around the world adopt the neo-liberal agenda of cut-backs and layoffs.

There have been several reactions to this in the small and fragmented movement of those who had long opposed Stalinism in the name of genuine socialism. Some downplay socialism in favour of the vital but limited task of taking part in today’s defensive struggles. Others act as if almost nothing has changed and carry on with ways of organizing and thinking inherited from the revolutionary left of the 1930s.

NEW SOCIALIST promotes another response to these difficult times. We seek to contribute to the renewal of the ideas and organization of what we call socialism from below – a socialism whose central idea is that the liberation of working class and oppressed peoples can only be won through a revolutionary transformation that they themselves carry through. Socialism cannot be achieved on anyone’s behalf by a party, guerilla army or other minority force.

Instead of simply clinging to the ideas passed down from Karl Marx and others, we recognize that socialism from below as it has survived must be critically assessed. Our times demand Marxist analysis and socialist strategy developed in response to the changing world of the late 20th century and the challenges of the next. To make progress in this direction, we believe that socialists should adopt a REVOLUTIONARY PLURALIST approach.

By revolutionary pluralism, we mean the building of democratic organizations of activists who are committed to the fundamental principles of socialism from

below and similar methods of work. This is a conscious break from how most anti-Stalinist socialists have organized since the 1920s. Often, even tiny groups of revolutionary socialists have adopted detailed programmes and split hairs about all sorts of questions that have little or no relation to their actual situation or their strategic tasks (for instance, about events of the past). Too many groups have taken tactics and methods that may have been appropriate in one situation and made them into universal guides to action. This has been a recipe for dogmatism and unnecessary divisions over less than vital differences.

Instead, revolutionary pluralist organizations seek to unite socialists from different backgrounds around a basis of unity concerning political questions shown by experience to be key. The New Socialist Group (NSG) sums this up in an “Our Politics” statement (available by writing to NEW SOCIALIST or on our website at www.newsocialist.org) which includes support for autonomous movements of the oppressed and recognition that both mass organizations of workers’ democracy and socialist parties are necessary for socialist revolutions to be successful. Unity can’t only exist on paper, of course, so members of a revolutionary pluralist group also need to share an understanding of how to put their politics into practice while being flexible about tactics.

Socialism from below survived the efforts of Stalinism and fascism to destroy it earlier in this century, but only barely. Its supporters are few in number. We have at best tenuous roots among working class and oppressed people. In these conditions, no socialist organization can develop more than limited insights about strategy and tactics. There is much to learn from other activists, as well as many lessons learned by socialists in the past to offer. Making socialism a force in the struggle once again will take a lot of work. The NSG believes that revolutionary pluralism will make renewing socialism from below a more viable project. If you agree, we invite you to join us or collaborate in whatever way you can.★

What kind of socialist organization?

BY DAVID McNALLY

A discussion document prepared for the New Socialist Conference March 3, 1996

I. SOCIALISM FROM BELOW AND THE ORGANIZATION QUESTION

The socialism from below perspective poses the question of organization in a unique way. In so doing, it distinguishes itself from the three main approaches which exist on the left. It may be useful to review these other approaches as a way of spelling out our own.

The first approach is the dominant one—the parliamentary-reformist model which fashions its mode of organization on the need to create a mass electoral party whose focus is on winning control of parliament. In this model, the exploited and oppressed are reduced to largely passive supporters (voters) who are meant to “buy” the campaign images and slogans of the reformist party. An elite of professional politicians and trade union officials are seen as the active agents of social change; the majority are at best footsoldiers.

Second, there is the variety of far-left approaches which are best described as sectist. In the sect model, usually based upon ludicrous caricatures of the Bolshevik experience in Russia, a tiny number of committed revolutionaries declare themselves the “vanguard” of the working class movement. This group believes itself to be the true-leadership-in-waiting of the working class. Convinced that it possesses the magic solution to “the riddles of history,” the vanguardist sect nurtures grandiose delusions of self-importance. It tends to replace genuine theoretical analysis with dogmatic slogans (who needs analysis when you’ve got everything solved in advance, after all) and it replaces open, democratic discussion and debate with the giving of a “line” cooked up by a “leadership” that has no real base in any mass movement. While the sect can often have a fanatical staying power and a highly dedicated membership, its rigidity, dogmatism and fanaticism deprive it of the capacity to ever develop into a genuine mass organization.

Finally, there is a variety of approaches that are best characterized as spontaneist. Spontaneism essentially disavows responsibility for socialist organization by declaring that everything will be sorted out spontaneously by the working class and oppressed groups—some day, some time. Spontaneism is fatalistic in character; it calls on people to await some grand historic moment when a great, almost mystical, break-through

will occur. Anarchism is the most clearly developed version of such spontaneism, since it is generally hostile in principle to any kind of commitment to building an organization.

The socialism from below approach differs from all of the above. In contrast to the parliamentary reformists, we hold that a revolutionary transformation of society can only be achieved through the mass struggle of the majority. Socialism requires the self-activity and the self-emancipation of the oppressed and exploited. At the same time, we believe that the rebellious forces of the working class and the oppressed need a mass party of a new type—a democratic, revolutionary party that can coordinate their activities in struggling against the old order.

While the sectists generally reject reformism and argue for a revolutionary party, they slide into an elitism of their own in which the select few, the true believers, the self-proclaimed vanguard are the key actors in the historical process. All that is necessary, they suggest, is to build their organization today and everything will work out. However much they may pay lip-service to the Marxist principle of working class self-emancipation, the sectist group drifts inevitably away from socialism from below as it comes to see the whole historical struggle revolving around itself, not the self-mobilization of the working class.

The spontaneists, on the other hand, “solve” the problem of organization by making it disappear. Rather than grapple with the real difficulties of how to build a revolutionary socialist current which doesn’t fall into reformism or sectism, they simply advise us to drop the problem entirely. Once again, the agency of people is eliminated—this time because we merely have to wait for “History” to sort things out spontaneously. Yet, as Engels argued 150 years ago, “History does nothing; it ‘possesses no colossal riches,’ it ‘fights no battles!’ Rather it is the human being, the actual and living human, who does all this, who possesses and fights.”

The problem of socialist organization begins when we refuse fatalism, when we accept that active socialists need to find some way to come together to increase their effectiveness—as both activists and socialists.

II. ORGANIZING AS ACTIVISTS AND SOCIALISTS

This last point is decisive. For, the key challenge is to find a way to be effective activists and socialists within the struggles and movements of the day. This is easier said than done; it is much easier to be one or the other.

To be a pure and simple activist is quite straightforward. One simply joins a campaign or coalition and helps to build its actions. However worthy these might be—and often they are extremely worthy—such an approach does little to build socialist consciousness about the nature of the society in which we live and what is truly needed to transform it.

The opposite side of the coin is the organized socialist who is effectively outside the movement. This individual relates to the struggle as a diversion at worst (the ultra-sectarian approach) or as a convenient means to the “real” end (building his or her group). The actual struggle of the moment is not seen as intrinsically important; its importance lies in providing a recruiting ground for the socialist sect.

The approach we seek is radically different. We want to find a way of operating as sincere, principled and constructive socialist activists within the movements. To that end, we want to insist upon the intrinsic importance of the struggles for their contribution to building self-activity, mobilizing and politicizing people, and winning real gains. At the same time, we want to operate as open socialists who discuss our political ideas, distribute our leaflets and publications, invite people to our meetings, and, in so doing, strengthen socialist consciousness and organization.

Engels outlined what this approach meant in the context of the democratic revolutionary upsurge in Germany in 1848. Explaining his and Marx’s decision to launch a left-wing democratic paper (the ‘*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*’) and how it positioned itself within the struggle, he wrote:

When we founded a wide-circulation paper in Germany its slogan presented itself automatically. It could only be the slogan of democracy but one that emphasized everywhere and in detail its specifically proletarian character which it could not yet inscribe on its banner once and for all. If one refused this, if we were unwilling to join the movement on its most progressive and proletarian wing there was nothing left but for us to preach Communism in a small corner magazine and found a small sect...

Two things are crucial here. First, Engels talks about joining the movement (i.e., not standing apart from it and preaching at it)—but joining it “on its most progressive and proletarian wing.” Secondly, he argues for taking up the basic slogan of the movement—in this case the struggle for “democracy” in mid-19th century Germany—while emphasizing “everywhere and in

detail” that only the seizure of political power by the working class could genuinely win this struggle. Here we have a classic formulation of the socialism from below approach: operating as committed activists, but activists who are on the left-wing of the movement, who are emphasizing “everywhere and in detail” the need for working class struggle and socialist perspectives.

Developing this point in a description of Marx’s approach to the trade unions, Hal Draper, one of the major theorists of socialism from below, wrote:

Socialists should act as a loyal left-wing of the class movement, not an alternative counterposed to it; they should start with the working class as it is and where it is in order to change it; they should be part of its real class organizations no matter how backward the mass might be from their standpoint; and they should become the best militants for the limited aims of the movement-as-is. But at the same time, and through this association, they seek to push the whole movement upwards to higher levels of class-struggle commitment and consciousness by means of the lessons of experience, all without giving up or hushing up their own full views or ceasing to criticize mistaken or ineffective policies.

III. ORGANIZING AROUND A SOCIALIST PUBLICATION

It is instructive that in the example taken from 1848 above, I referred to the newspaper Marx edited at the time—the ‘*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*.’ Marx and Engels strongly believed was that while operating within the movement socialists needed a way of broadly disseminating their unique position in the struggle. Otherwise, they would tail behind the existing leadership of the movement rather than offer a distinctly socialist perspective. It’s arguable, in fact, that it is impossible for socialists to operate on an open and principled basis without a publication. Every time one thinks of revolutionary socialists operating in the midst of important struggles, they are linked to a publication: Marx and the ‘*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*’, Lenin and ‘*Iskra*’ (‘Spark’) in the early years of the Bolshevik movement and ‘*Pravda*’ (‘Truth’) during the years of the coming revolution, Rosa Luxemburg and ‘*Die Rote Fahne*’ (‘The Red Flag’) in Germany in 1918-19, Antonio Gramsci and ‘*L’Ordine Nuovo*’ (‘New Order’) during the strikes and factory occupations of 1919-20 in Italy.

A publication is vital because it can perform several key tasks. First, it is a means of disseminating socialist ideas, analysis, and proposals for action. Second, it can provide a forum for discussion and debate for a whole layer of militants and activists. Third, it can help generalize experience by enabling one group of workers and oppressed people to see how their experience compares

with that of other groups. Finally, it can become the means for linking together the ideas, experiences and activities of a whole number of people so that they might maximize their effectiveness as socialist activists within the struggle.

Because it is public by nature, a publication makes the idea of a socialist current concrete—it gives it a face, a shape, an identity. Rather than saying one belongs to a seemingly mysterious group which most people have never heard of, one presents a publication which is oriented outwards, which is designed to relate to and engage with the real experiences of large numbers of people. A publication is central to the “coming out” of socialists with their co-workers, fellow students, other activists, and so on. It enables us to give a concrete shape to our involvement in a socialist group (“we organize around this magazine”).

IV. THE POLITICS OF SOCIALISM FROM BELOW TODAY

Thus far, I have laid out some general ideas about how those in the tradition of socialism from below approach the question of organizing. Now we need to look more concretely at the situation of socialism from below activists in Canada (and most parts of the world) today. Let’s begin with four basic observations.

First, it has been more than 50 years since Marxist politics have claimed any meaningful support from a “vanguard” of the working class (i.e. from thousands of militant, class conscious working people). There is thus a gap or break in the historical tradition of the revolutionary socialist left.

As a result of this, Marxist groups have been thoroughly marginalized for decades.

It follows, secondly, that the problem confronting radical socialists is not that of organizing a vanguard of militant workers into an organization. That vanguard is not there waiting for organization; instead, such an advanced layer of workers will have to be created through its own struggles. As Duncan Hallas wrote some 25 years ago, “in human terms, an organised layer of thousands of workers, by hand and by brain, firmly rooted amongst their fellow workers and with a shared consciousness of the necessity for socialism, has to be created.”

To fail to recognize this, to believe that one simply has to wave the red flag for workers to come running to it, is an error which has plagued the far-left since the 1930s.

The third thing we need to recognize is that the “new left” created by the mass struggles of the period 1964-76 has largely collapsed. While a handful of significant organizations have survived (with various strengths and weaknesses), most of the surviving groups have failed to come to terms with the mistakes made by the left during that period. Most of the groups that remain are firmly entrenched in the sectist form of organization and show little capacity for fresh, dynamic development.

Finally, it is vital to understand that real possibilities for socialist organizing have been created by the “new political period” which has opened up since 1989—encompassing in particular the democratic revolutions in East European, the release of Nelson Mandela and the formation of an ANC government, the opposition to the Gulf War, the electoral instability and bursts of mass protest (e.g. Italy, 1994; France 1995; and, on a much smaller scale, Ontario 1995-96) produced by the recession of 1989-92 and the intensifying war against social programs. Recognizing that there is a new period of sorts does not require holding to the ludicrous idea that we have returned to a 1930s-style crisis of capitalism, or that we are in a period of “mass radicalization” in which a revolutionary group can become a small mass party in a handful of years.

The situation in which Marxists find themselves today is thus highly complex. On the one hand, there is a new political questioning among thousands of people in the midst of a renewal of social protest, and out of this combination a new audience for socialist politics is being created. On the other hand, the socialist left is terribly weak and small, most groups are sectarian caricatures of authentic Marxist politics, and the impact of socialist politics on the new struggles is quite minimal.

In this context, what is needed is to move towards a socialist group which is politically principled, vigorously anti-sectist, and open and democratic in both its internal life and the way in which it works with others.★

About the Authors

TJ BAKER lives in Vancouver.

At the time of writing, DAVID CAMFIELD was a member of CUPE 3903 and the New Socialist Group.

SUSAN FERGUSON is a member of the New Socialist Group.

TODD GORDON is an editor of *New Socialist* magazine.

KATHERINE GRZEJSZCZAK is a member of the New Socialist Group.

DENISE HAMMOND is a member of the New Socialist Group.

JANIS KALETA lives in Vancouver.

GARY KINSMAN is an activist in Sudbury and author of *The Regulation of Desire*

PETER KULCHYSKI lives in Winnipeg and is a long-time aboriginal solidarity activist and researcher.

SEBASTIAN LAMB is an editor of *New Socialist* magazine.

HAROLD LAVENDER Harold Lavender is a long time socialist activist and a member of the editorial committee of *New Socialist*.

PAUL LE BLANC is a member of the U.S. socialist group Solidarity, the editor of *From Marx to Gramsci* and the author of *A Short History of the U.S. Working Class*

DAVID MCNALLY is the author of *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* and other books, and is a member of the New Socialist Group.

ALAN SEARS lives in Toronto and is the author of *Retooling the Mind Factory*

ANGUS THEOURS was a member of the New Socialist Group.

INGRID VAN DER KLOET is a member of the New Socialist Group.

MARIE VAN DER KLOET is a graduate student in Toronto.

ELLEN WOOD is author of numerous books and articles. Her latest book is *The Empire of Capital*

SIMA ZEREHI is a member of the New Socialist Group

NSG Contact Information

The New Socialist Group (NSG) is active in a number of cities. Please phone 416-955-1581, or e-mail nsg@newsocialist.org. Also, our website at www.newsocialist.org is frequently updated with news and analysis from around the world, and with information about upcoming NSG events and *New Socialist* magazine.