

THE WORKING CLASS AFTER THE VANGUARD

Process and Plurality in the Theory and Practice of
Working Class Organization

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines what the two sides of class – *capital* and *working class* - have meant in left parlance, what these meanings imply about class struggle, and how they were put into political practice through Communist Parties and trade unions. Ideas about class and strategies for class struggle continue to be central to the left, as the various ways these are conceptualized give rise to very different answers to some common and persistent questions: Who is legitimately a *worker* and when? Why, how and with what result are certain struggles delayed or subsumed within others? At what point does self-criticism cross over to counter-revolutionary dissent? And what might continuing schisms over these questions tell us about traditional left organizations?

The thesis traces the development of 'the left' from its key conceptual subject, *the working class*, through its two most widely-adopted organizational strategies in order to examine the poverty of the left's analytical and political traditions, particularly as regards (1) the notion of socialism as an alternative management plan and (2) ideas about *capital* and *working class* that stressed the embodiments of power relations rather than those relations themselves, and which were lifted directly from capital's own definitions of productivity. Finally, the thesis argues that insights from long-neglected Marxisms, certain critical post-structuralisms and the political strategies of some emergent anti-capitalist networks together offer the opportunity to produce a more fluid, and more liberatory left, imbued with: (1) an understanding of class as a relationship that does not inhere to individuals or organizations, and (2) a notion of the working class as a permanent resistance that has nothing whatever to do with a particular ideology or strategy; with (3) an analysis which emphasizes situational relationships of power that are at once racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed; and (4) a political approach which draws means and ends together in an emphasis on resistance as the troubling of order, and revolution as a process of refusal.

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BEGINNINGS

IT'S THE SAME DRILL WITH EVERY NEW THERAPIST, AS I RECOUNT A BRIEF HISTORY OF MY RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIVIDUALS AND THE WORLD AROUND — MY PARENTS, A LEFT-WING CATHOLIC PURITAN AND A MODERN-DAY ST. FRANCIS BUT WITHOUT THE JOY. THE CHRONOLOGY — BAUCHI, NIGERIA; THE HOUSE AT LITTLETOWN IN WILTSHIRE; ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PARAMILITARY IN GUATEMALA; DRINK AND TRUANCY IN SANDINISTA NICARAGUA; ZIMBABWE AND AN INCREDIBLE HOME-NESS; THE DISINTEGRATION OF SOUTH-CENTRAL LOS ANGELES; SUCCESSIVELY-MORE DEPRESSING TRIPS TO CUBA; AND WORK AND UNIONS AND MY DAUGHTER, MICA. RELATIONSHIPS FOLLOW A SIMILAR GEOGRAPHIC PATTERN — A HOSPITAL AT THREE YEARS OLD WITH YOUNG ACTIVISTS READING TO ME ABOUT DINOSAURS; UP A WILTSHIRE HILLSIDE PAST THE GREAT CHALK HORSE CARVED INTO THE HILL GOD KNOWS HOW MANY YEARS BEFORE; SCHOOLING AND MANY DAYS BANISHED TO THE HALLWAY FOR DISRUPTION; GUATEMALAN EXILES WITH EVER-CHANGING NAMES AND COUNTRIES; KIDS IN THE WAR AGAINST THE CONTRAS AND SUICIDES AMONG THOSE WHO WANT PEACE SO DESPERATELY THEY EAT THEMSELVES — THE COUNTED AND UNCOUNTED VICTIMS OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY; DRINK AND POLICE CARS AND TOO MANY FRIENDS WITH KNIVES AND NOTHING TO DO, AND MY CHOICE INSTEAD FOR SOLITUDE AND A NOTEBOOK; MAX AND ZIMBABWE AND AIDS AND HOLDING HIS HAND FOR DAYS AS HE PREPARED TO DIE; AND IN MY OWN HOME, PARTNERSHIP WITH JO, CRISIS AND MICA.

THEN THE QUESTIONS - I CAN'T ANSWER ANY. THEN THE ANALYSIS - I CAN'T BE BOTHERED. BUT THREE DAYS LATER I MEET NAPO. THIRTY MINUTES AT A PARTY SETS MY MIND SPINNING, MY GUTS HURTING, AND THESE PAGES IN MOTION.

NAPO FLED EL SALVADOR IN THE MID-EIGHTIES, AT THE PEAK OF THE REPRESSION, AS I SLEPT WITH THREE BROTHERS IN A VW VAN HEADED FOR REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN A NICARAGUAN FISHING VILLAGE. THE MAN WHO MET US THERE - THEN A CANADIAN LIVING IN NICARAGUA - IS THE SAME MAN - BY NOW A NICARAGUAN LIVING IN CANADA - TO MEET NAPO AS HE ARRIVES IN OTTAWA SOME YEARS LATER. WE SHARE NAMES AND DATES AND PLACES, AND THEN THERE'S A SILENCE AND A LOOK. WHERE DID THAT HOPE GO? SOMEHOW THE WAR OF LIBERATION SIMPLY ENDED - NOT IN DEFEAT, NOT IN VICTORY, BUT IN EXHAUSTION. 'THIS IS THE WAY THE REVOLUTION ENDS, NOT WITH A BANG BUT A WHIMPER', OR SOMETHING ALONG THOSE LINES. WE TALK OF SHIFTING BORDERS AND HOMELESSNESS, OF IDENTITY AND EXILE, OF COMMUNITIES IN STRUGGLE AND STRUGGLES WITH DISILLUSIONMENT, OF CHE GUEVARA IN THE CONGO AND THAT "DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC"'S RECENT BLOODLETTING. SOMEHOW IN ALL THIS WHAT MATTERS IS HE AND I, NOW, REMEMBERING, SMILING, FALLING APART. AND IN THIS IS THE ONLY THING I KNOW - THAT IF REVOLUTION AND COMMUNITY AND HISTORY AND THEORY AND ORGANIZATION AND STRUGGLE AND (GOD HELP ME) DOCTORATE ARE TO MEAN ANYTHING AT ALL, THAT MEANING WILL TAKE SHAPE IN THE SPACES BETWEEN MY LIFE AND THE WORDS ON THE PAGE. IT CAN ONLY BE ABOUT LIVES AND RELATIONSHIPS - ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL.

SO I WONDER ABOUT SCHOOLING AND WORK AND UNIONS AND WORKING FOR A UNION OF SCHOLARS. I REFLECT ON THE COLLAPSE OF THE LEFT I WAS RAISED WITH, ON THE WAY MY TRANSITION FROM ADOLESCENCE TO ADULTHOOD MARCHED IN STEP WITH THE COLD WAR'S COLLAPSE AND THE VACUUM OF ALTERNATIVES. AND I REFLECT ON MICA'S BIRTH AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW MOVEMENT – PLURAL, CONTRADICTORY, ANGRY AND AFRAID, AND MORE JOYFUL THAN I'VE SEEN BEFORE. BABIES AND STRUGGLES COME INTO THE WORLD DRIPPING FROM HEAD TO FOOT, FROM EVERY PORE, WITH BLOOD AND JOY AND POSSIBILITY. SO WHERE AM I AND WHERE ARE WE ALL AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE EXPLORE WHAT HAPPENS BEHIND OUR WORDS? SOMEHOW, HERE I CAN WRITE AGAIN, AND HERE I CAN SEE HOW JUMBLED PAGES OF DIARY AND HISTORY AND THEORY MIGHT HELP ME MAKE SENSE OF IT ALL, WHEN THEY ARE READ IN THE CONTEXT OF A LIFE.

Introduction

This thesis traces a lot of history, a lot of geographic space, and my own personal story, drawing strands of theory and experience together to interrogate one of the most basic and one of the most problematic concepts of the broadly-defined left – *class*. As a kid born into a radical, globe-trotting family on the eve of neoliberalism, I have grown, learned, and worked in human crisis, economic crisis, political crisis, ideological crisis. I was born in 1972 Nigeria, as that country came out of the Biafran war to be met by a new global offensive whose first shots were fired half a world away – theoretically in the pages of economic journals, fiscally in Nixon's abandonment of the gold standard, militarily in Pinochet's seizure of office in Chile. As that war spread to every corner of the world, and as the twentieth century left made its last offensive in the mid-1980s, I followed it, from the state terror of Guatemala and the hope of Sandinista Nicaragua to southern Africa to witness the death of legislated apartheid and the ease with which revolutionaries traded 5-year plans for structural adjustment. And then, as the right read its Gramsci and skillfully framed its own class analysis as common-sense, and as the left collapsed into nihilist post-modernisms, apologetic post-Marxisms and pragmatic 'third ways', and as Cuba seemed to stand alone as a reminder of old utopias – amidst all of this I began an academic career attempting to make sense of it all and a political/ professional career in the labour movement. And what has struck me over the past decade is how wide and how deep are the scars of that twentieth century left. As new resistance movements have emerged, the major organizations of the old left – trade unions, non-

governmental organizations and political parties – remain woefully short-sighted strategically and entirely lost ideologically. And as new forms of resistance well up, these too inherit those old wounds in some fashion.

And so I sit in this coffee shop today, trying to weave some path from where I sit back through history and theory, and trying to make sense of how my own thinking on the key concepts of the left – class, organization, revolution – has (I hope) deepened over these years, and how in my political work I am so often astounded by the tenacity of conceptual frameworks that seem not only outdated but farcical in the contemporary context. For despite a rediscovery of the language of class, and an acceptance by left intellectuals – a grudging one by old Marxists, a self-congratulatory one by post-structuralists – that the concept needs some updating, very little in the way of a serious re-thinking has actually filtered into our organizational strategies. And despite the fact that there is near-unanimous agreement that the mainstream left – communist and social-democratic – quite simply collapsed when faced with a coordinated political, economic and cultural offensive on the part of capital, shockingly little has been done to understand why. Oh, there are countless books and articles chronicling the collapse, lamenting the loss of a dream or bursting with ‘i-told-you-sos’. And there are many more calling for renewed hope and renewed activism to rebuild something akin to the welfare state. But there is little that interrogates the reasons for the left’s collapse, and very little that does so examining the relationship between our key conceptual ideas, our stated objectives, and our organizations.

These pages attempt such a project, examining the idea of *class* as it has been used by two very different lefts represented organizationally by trade unions and Communist Parties. Through history, theory, and bits of my own biography, I interrogate what the two sides of class – *capital* and *working class* - have meant in left parlance, what these meanings imply about the means and ends of class struggle, and how all this was put into political practice. Ultimately the work is about left traditions - Communist and trade unionist - in the global west, but it is a broad project, touching on conquest and colonization, the rise of capitalism, the nature of socialism, the challenge of post-structuralism. It mingles counter-revolution in Latin America with early discourses about who and what is a worker, and dips into histories of prostitution and toilets to help understand just where the theoretical working class came from. But there is a thread, and all the above are strands of it. Ideas about class and strategies for class struggle continue to be central to the left, to its hundred-year-old organizations struggling to stay relevant and its newest networks establishing their ground. And in this political moment, as we witness once again the kinds of intense struggle and massive but fractured resistance that defined other key periods of class struggle - 1848, 1917-1922, 1968-1973, each of which, in turn, birthed a new left — there is an opportunity to return to our history, to its muck as well as its treasure, and to cull from it what lessons we can about where we are, how we came to be, and what choices lie before us.

I begin with the problem that brought me here – having worked as a professional staffer and activist in left organizations and trade unions, I have

experienced a deep and lasting tension between the class location of organizations which represent workers and the class location of those organizations vis a vis their own workers. And this intersects with further tensions – Who is legitimately a *worker* and when? Why, how and with what result are certain struggles delayed or subsumed within others? At what point does self-criticism cross over to counter-revolutionary dissent? And might growing schisms over these questions in post-Cold War political work have something to do with the continuing crisis of traditional left organizations?

As I trace my own journey through these issues, I will trace, too, the development of what is called 'the left' from its key conceptual subject, *the working class*, through its two most widely-adopted organizational choices – Communist Parties and trade unions. I will examine the poverty of the left's analytical and political traditions, and argue that the two forementioned organizational strategies represent time- and goal-specific models that unwittingly helped to produce their own irrelevance as alternatives to capital. I will argue that both stemmed quite naturally from a shared notion of socialism as an alternative management plan – however differently the policies of that socialism might have been envisioned by the two. And I will argue that that socialism, in turn, rested upon and reinforced notions of *capital* and *working class* that stressed the embodiments of power relations rather than those relations themselves, and which were lifted directly from capital's own definitions of who and what was 'productive'. Finally, I will suggest that insights from long-neglected Marxisms, certain critical post-structuralisms and the political strategies of some,

emergent anti-capitalist networks together offer the opportunity to produce a new, more fluid, and more liberatory left, imbued with: (1) an understanding of class as a relationship or a tension that does not and can never inhere to individuals or organizations, and (2) of the working class as a permanent resistance that has nothing whatever to do with a particular ideology or political strategy; with (3) an analysis which emphasizes situational relationships of power that are at once racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed; and with (4) a political approach which draws means and ends together in an emphasis on resistance as the troubling of order, and revolution as a process of refusal.

The work is laid out in three parts: *The Heritage*, *The Histories*, and *Crises and Potentials*. The first examines the key class categories on which the identity and purpose of the left has been based – *capital* and *working class*, *socialism* and *union*, tracing the conceptual and analytical debates, the commonalities of the two lefts represented by Communist Parties and trade unions respectively, and the strategic and organizational decisions which arose from these conceptual frameworks – specifically, the trade union and state socialist models, both of which claimed representation of something universal called *the working class*, and each of which articulated some alternative order as its ultimate objective¹.

¹ In shorthand I will refer to these two organizational forms collectively as the official workers' organizations, not to imply their superiority over any other movements, nor to suggest they were adequately representative of any particular group of workers, let alone workers in some universal sense. Quite simply, through most of the 20th century states, capital, and intellectuals of all political stripes looked to these as representative of the abstract 'worker' interest, and these two models, with their international organizational presence, dominate the history of what we call the left. Of course, Communist Parties had affiliate unions of their own; trade unions, likewise, have typically been aligned with non-communist left parties. But it is the CP left and the mainstream labour movement that have claimed some universal 'voice of workers', and have been associated

The second portion reviews the main contours of twentieth-century class struggle, again with a view to political class formation and class strategies². The two dominant capitalist strategies of the twentieth century - Keynesianism and neoliberalism - are surveyed, as are working class responses – both generalized social responses, and formal organizational ones.

Finally, *Crises and Potentials* examines the status of class strategies in recent decades and to the present, exploring what these might tell us about the nature of *class* and *class struggle*. The emphasis, in the end, shall be upon the core concepts: *class* and *revolution* – why they continue to matter, and how we might re-think them in light of previous experience and the strategic and organizational challenges facing the left today – both its dynamic but fractured networks and its well-established but poorly-equipped institutions. I shall argue in the end that class does not inhere to organizations, nor even to individuals. It is a relationship that is reproduced in the daily interactions of real people, but a relationship whose positions may be occupied by different individuals or groups at different times. This is a notion of class defined by its plurality and its contingency – neither discursive or symbolic as so many post-modern thinkers have suggested, nor so simple or tangible as the left has supposed. It is a

widely and in diverse cultural locations as representative of class-specific interests. And it is this notion of an organizational representative of a universal class which is so central to the project of re-thinking.

² Throughout these pages I will refer extensively to *strategies* rather than *systems*, whether speaking of governance or resistance. The trade union and the Communist Party, Keynesian and neo-liberal policymaking – each of these, I will argue, represents a strategic approach to achieve specific class aims, and each achieved a certain hegemony in its time and among significant actors. Whereas terms like 'system', 'order', and 'structure', however, imply something monolithic and self-generating, *strategy* emphasizes both conscious creation and the generation of a collective-wisdom rather than a unanimity.

relationship whose intractability and resilience stem precisely from its ability to morph and to move.

Interspersed throughout are bits and pieces of my own story, illustrating – I hope – the significance of these largely theoretical matters in the shaping of my own relationship with the left, and other snapshots from class struggle that set the tone for the discussions that follow. It is a bit of a collage, but no less unified for that. After all, if there is one lesson to be taken from the twentieth century left, it is that the most lasting solidarities are collections of autonomies, the most far-reaching revolutions those that retain some disorder.

A Note on Style and Method:

Though autobiographical in some places, simply informal in others, and noticeably different than a traditional academic dissertation, what follows is not without a logic or structure. There is a generally-consistent alternation of voices throughout: moments of autobiography, written more or less as stream-of-consciousness; moments of foreshadowing, in which significant historical vignettes or analytical insights hint at the discussion to follow; and more properly 'academic' chapters, written as parts of the whole but also designed to be relatively self-sufficient. The intention has been to draw together life-history, conversation, and academic discourse to fashion a piece of writing which situates the content in lived experience and engages with real political problems on the left while maintaining a method and analysis consistent with scholarly expectations.

There are, then, a number of methodological approaches interacting here, their boundaries by no means neat. Formal interviews, conforming to standard ethical guidelines and consisting of a more or less consistent set of questions, inform the discussion of trade union staff in Chapter 12. These were conducted with elected union officials and both professional and clerical staffpeople, all of whom had direct experience with job actions by union staff against union organizations. The interviews all addressed issues of class identity and the perceived conflict between workers' interests and the interests of the left more broadly, though were targeted in places to the particular role and experience of the interviewee. Informal interviews and conversations, both with the interviewees and with friends and co-conspirators in various political activities, help to shape context but are rarely explicitly referred to, and do not in any way directly impact the argument except where clearly cited. Symbolic-interactionism's influence runs throughout, as significant portions draw upon individual lives and meanings, and arise out of "knowledge and history of events" rather than "knowledge and history *about*" events (Denzin, 1981: 159). Participant-observation and what Touraine calls "sociological intervention" (Touraine, 1981) both are at play, given my involvement in the kinds of organizations and movements under discussion and at times as an actor in specific events referred to. And, of course, the bulk of the work is history and theory, rooted less in any specific study than in the interplay of a wide range of readings over the course of some fifteen years.

But perhaps most noticeable, given its distance from traditional approaches, is the role of autobiography. Life stories are increasingly common in sociological work, the advantages and challenges they pose spawning a substantial literature. Franco Ferrarotti suggests that the use of biography or autobiography requires that we replace classical epistemology with a *dialectical reason* which acknowledges the "permanent feedback" loop between individual and structure (1981: 20). Such an approach certainly raises potential questions of self-reflection and of truth-claims (Kohli, 1981; Touraine, 1981); but how problematic these are will vary widely and will be influenced by how they are used, both analytically and discursively, and to what extent these knowledges are distinguished from other knowledges in the work itself. For my part, I have set those autobiographical portions apart from the analytical work to mark as clearly as possible the various voices; and it is worth noting as well that the life-history pieces were generally written after first drafts of the chapters themselves, as reflection upon my analytical trajectories. This is not to suggest that the impact of one's own experience can ever be discreetly packaged and laid aside, but rather to be explicit about how the various approaches emerged in my writing.

More generally, my writing is influenced by a number of traditions, and all are evidenced at various points in the preceding work. North American oral working class histories have been a profound influence, formally through my experience with the IWW and informally through years of family storytelling and mythmaking about work in mining, forestry, fisheries; the unique power of story and verse has been reinforced with my exposure to West African, southern

African and Central American traditions – as Nancy White sings of Nicaragua, “when you hear a song that tells how to clean your gun, son, then you understand how that revolution was won”. And of course my own literary and academic background, too, shapes the structure and tone of the work. I began my university career in creative writing – poetry in particular - at the University of Victoria, then going on to interdisciplinary work in Latin American Studies and only entering anything like an academic discipline for my doctoral program. If there is an eclecticism, then, that arises in no small part from the interdisciplinarity of my academic career and my aversion to boundaries between knowledge and experience, history and myth, materialism and culture. If there is a casualness, or even a sarcasm in places, it is quite simply because I feel much more like a creative writer than an academic one, and find the sound of a sentence as important as its content. On both counts, I am acutely aware that my work may not conform to standard sociological practice; but on both I make no apologies.

This is not a highly-technical work. Academia is generally characterized by ever-more narrow specializations, a tendency only reinforced with post-structuralism’s disregard for broad claims. Me, I’m by nature more of a meta-theory, generalist kind of guy. I do not pretend to any startling new discovery or test of a particular theory. I read eclectically and spit it out onto paper, writing not from notes or outlines but from whatever words seem to make sense and sound right, later going back to check on what I’ve said: the consistencies and inconsistencies, the supported conclusions and unfounded claims. It is, I

acknowledge, a creative-writing approach. But I would suggest, too, that it is an entirely appropriate approach for any discussion which seeks to connect theory and experience, and engage both scholarly and political debate.

THE HERITAGE

ZIMBABWE – STRUCTURALLY-ADJUSTING SOCIALISTS

A 5:00 AM PHONE CALL IN JANUARY 1992, AND I WAKE UP TO MAX'S VOICE - QUIET, CRYING, SAYING GOODBYE. WITHIN A WEEK I'M ON MY WAY TO ZIMBABWE, WHERE I'LL SPEND TWO WEEKS AT BEDSIDE, HOLDING HIS HAND, EMPTYING HIS URINE FROM A PLASTIC BAG STRAPPED TO HIS LEG, SINGING AND WALKING AND TELLING STORIES TO HIS FOUR KIDS, SITTING AND WATCHING LUCIA AS SHE TRIES TO SAY HER OWN GOODBYE WHILE MOVING THE FAMILY FROM SHAMU VILLAGE TO A HIGH-DENSITY HARARE NEIGHBOURHOOD SO SHE CAN FIND WORK. I'M LEARNING A GREAT DEAL ABOUT AIDS. THEN TWO WEEKS OF FUNERAL, AS SHAMU PLAYS HOST TO STREET KIDS, COMMUNIST PRIESTS, SEX WORKERS AND THE NICARAGUAN AND CUBAN AMBASSADORS – WE PLACE MAX'S CLOTHES AND OTHER BELONGINGS IN A PILE, AND DISTRIBUTE THEM; A FEW GOATS ARE SLAUGHTERED; WE DANCE AND SHOUT AND CRY; MOSTLY I POUND GROUND-NUTS INTO PEANUT BUTTER.

ZIMBABWE, 1988. THE SO-CALLED MARXIST GOVERNMENT OF ROBERT MUGABE HAS SIGNED ESAP – THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMME – AN AGREEMENT WITH ITS INTERNATIONAL CREDITORS TO CUT SPENDING AND BOOST DEBT SERVICE PAYMENTS. AS AUSTERITY TAKES COMMAND OF POLICY-MAKING. THE LEFT HERE IS FORGING SOME INTERESTING UNITIES. OFFICIALLY, THE TWO PARTIES OF NATIONAL LIBERATION HAVE MERGED INTO ONE NEW ZANU-PF, WHILE IN VILLAGES AND HIGH-DENSITY SUBURBS A CONSENSUS BEGINS TO FORM THAT THIS IS NOT WHAT LIBERATION LOOKS LIKE.

I FIND THE CONTRAST WITH 1985 NICARAGUA STAGGERING. TWO COUNTRIES WITH SIMILAR PROCESSES AND TIME-FRAMES OF 'NATIONAL LIBERATION', WITH SIMILAR

APPROACHES – AT LEAST RHETORICALLY – TO NON-COLD-WAR SOCIALISM. BUT WHERE EACH DAY IN NICARAGUA I SANG BEFORE SCHOOL CARLOS MEJIA GODOY'S HYMN OF THE REVOLUTION:

ADELANTE, MARCHEMOS COMPAÑEROS
AVANCEMOS A LA REVOLUCIÓN
NUESTRO PUEBLO ES EL DUEÑO DE SU HISTORIA

ARQUITECTO DE SU LIBERACIÓN
COMBATIENTES DEL FRENTE SANDINISTA
AVANCEMOS, ES NUESTRO PORVENIR
ROJA Y NEGRA,
LA BANDERA NOS COBIJA
PATRIA LIBRE
A VENCER O MORIR!

LOS HIJOS DE SANDINO
NI SE VENDEN
NI SE RINDEN
LUCHAMOS CONTRA EL YANKEE
ENEMIGO DE LA HUMANIDAD

ADELANTE, MARCHEMOS COMPAÑEROS...

WE MARCH FORWARD, COMRADES
WE ADVANCE THE REVOLUTION
OUR PEOPLE ARE THE OWNERS OF
THEIR HISTORY
ARCHITECTS OF THEIR LIBERATION
SOLDIERS OF THE SANDINISTA FRONT
WE ADVANCE, IT IS OUR FUTURE
RED AND BLACK
THE FLAG WE WEAR
FREE HOMELAND
TO VICTORY OR TO DEATH

THE CHILDREN OF SANDINO
WILL NOT BE SOLD
NOR SURRENDER
WE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE YANKEE
THE ENEMY OF HUMANITY

WE MARCH FORWARD, COMRADES...

HERE I WATCH FORMER FREEDOM FIGHTERS SPIN RIOT POLICE AT THE UNIVERSITY, ATTACKS ON STRIKERS, BANS ON LEFT-WING PUBLICATIONS, AND IMF PARTNERSHIPS FOR AUSTERITY INTO A SOMEHOW-STILL-REVOLUTIONARY VIGOUR – BUT FEW ARE BUYING IT.

FRANCISCO CAMPBELL, NICARAGUA'S AMBASSADOR TO ZIMBABWE, SHAKES HIS HEAD; "NICARAGUA TODAY IS NOT HOW IT WAS IN 1985. THIS IS NO ANOMALY." IN TWO YEARS THE SANDINISTAS WILL GO DOWN TO ELECTORAL DEFEAT AS THAT COUNTRY VOTES TO TRADE HOPE FOR PEACE.

JEAN VANIER, TOO, IS IN ZIMBABWE. SON OF CANADA'S FORMER GOVERNOR-GENERAL, HE CONSIDERED THE PRIESTHOOD BEFORE OPTING FOR A MORE RISKY, MORE REVOLUTIONARY PATH. HE BEGAN VISITING INSTITUTIONS FOR THE MENTALLY-CHALLENGED, FORMED FRIENDSHIPS, AND BUILT THE COMMUNITY OF L'ARCHE – A

MULTIFAITH ORGANIZATION, NOW IN VIRTUALLY EVERY COUNTRY OF THE GLOBE, IN WHICH HOMES ARE BUILT FOR THE MOST REJECTED AND MOST DESPISED AND THEIR ALLIES – COMMUNITY HOMES, COMMUNIST HOMES IN THE BEST SENSE OF THE WORD.

JEAN IS IN ZIMBABWE TO SPEAK TO A GATHERING OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN L'ARCHE COMMUNITIES; I AM TURNING 16 YEARS OLD, AND I AM SHAKEN TO MY CORE BY HIS GENTLENESS AND HIS JOY. I UNDERSTAND NOW CHE'S WORDS PLASTERED ALL OVER A STRUGGLING NICARAGUA – THE TRUEST REVOLUTIONARY IS GUIDED BY GREAT FEELINGS OF LOVE.

AS WE PREPARE TO LEAVE THE RETREAT CENTRE, A MAN APPROACHES. MAX IS THIRTY-THREE YEARS OLD, 6'4, POWERFUL. "I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU THESE PAST DAYS", HE SAYS. "I THINK YOU SHOULD COME STAY WITH ME – IN MY VILLAGE."

"O.K." IS ALL I ANSWER, AND I SCRIBBLE MY ADDRESS ON THE NEWSPAPER HE'S HOLDING OUT.

A WEEK LATER I AM IN SHAMU, THIS COMMUNITY OF 200 HOUSEHOLDS ON COMMUNAL LANDS SOME 80 MILES NORTHEAST OF HARARE, BEING SHOWN THE ROOM THAT WILL BE MINE FOR THE NEXT YEAR, MEETING THE FOUR CHILDREN – ONE ONLY DAYS OLD –, AMBUYA/ GRANDMOTHER, AND LUCIA, MAX' PARTNER. ANOTHER WEEK AND I WAKE UP TO THE SMELL OF THE FIRE AND THE CHILDREN CHASING SNAKES. I SHAKE MY SHOES FOR SCORPIONS AND STEP OUT FROM MY CONCRETE ROOM INTO THE 7:00 A.M. SUNSHINE. A SPLASH OF WATER FROM THE WELL AND I MOVE TOWARD THE DARKNESS OF THE COOKING HUT, CLAPPING A GREETING.

MAX IS EATING FIRE-COOKED TOAST TWO INCHES THICK, GOOSE EGGS, AND SLICED TOMATO. I DRAW A MUG OF CREAMY SWEET TEA FROM THE POT ON THE FIRE AND

GLANCE AROUND FOR BREAKFAST. MAX APPEARS TO TAKE NO NOTICE, FINISHES HIS MEAL, AND SMILES AT ME. "THE FOOD IS GONE" – HE HANDS ME A CIGARETTE INSTEAD. I'M SILENT AS I SMOKE. "YOU NEED TO GO." I DON'T UNDERSTAND. MAX EXPLAINS THAT ONE CAN ONLY BE A GUEST FOR A WEEK BEFORE THE RELATIONSHIP CHANGES. "IF YOU ARE GOING TO STAY IN THIS HOME, IN THIS COMMUNITY, THEN YOU NEED TO KNOW THE COMMUNITY ON YOUR OWN. GO. YOU CAN COME BACK TO SLEEP TONIGHT. DON'T WORRY – IF YOU ARE HUNGRY, SOMEONE WILL FEED YOU." THERE'S NO DISCUSSION; THIS IS NOT DEBATABLE. WHEN I RETURN LATE THAT NIGHT, I AM WELL-FED, A LITTLE DRUNK, AND I KNOW MANY NEW SONGS. WHEN I WAKE THE NEXT MORNING I EAT, AND AM SENT TO BUY MILK FROM THE GROCERY STORE IN THE NEXT TOWN – OVER TWO HOURS WALK. EVIDENTLY I AM A PROJECT; I WILL BE TAUGHT TO SIT FOR HOURS IN SILENCE. I WILL BE TAUGHT ABOUT THE HEADMAN WHO BOUGHT A MERCEDES TO IMPRESS OTHER VILLAGERS, AND SEE THAT MERCEDES NOW STRAPPED TO A PLOW TO PREPARE THE EARTH FOR TOMATOES AND GREEN VEGETABLES; I WILL BE TAUGHT ABOUT WHITENESS; I WILL BE TAUGHT TO LISTEN; I WILL BE TAUGHT HOW COLONIALISM RESONATES TODAY AND IS REPRODUCED IN CONVERSATION AND WORK – MINE INCLUDED. I WILL BE TAUGHT A GREAT DEAL, AND PERHAPS EVEN LEARN A LITTLE.

AFTER THE BURIAL, AND AFTER SOME MONTHS WRITING ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA'S TRANSITION FROM APARTHEID FOR THE IWW'S *INDUSTRIAL WORKER*, I MEET IN A SMOKY RESTAURANT WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF SOUTH AFRICA'S PAN-AFRICANIST CONGRESS, TO DISCUSS, OF ALL THINGS, THE SINO-SOVIET SPLIT. THEY CONVINCE ME I WILL NOT UNDERSTAND SOUTHERN AFRICAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS, COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN MOZAMBIQUE AND ANGOLA, MUGABE'S HOLD ON POWER, OR NELSON MANDELA'S RELEASE FROM PRISON WITHOUT GOING BACK TO KRUSCHEV AND MAO. A WEEK IN ENGLAND EN ROUTE HOME AND I AM BACK IN VANCOUVER FOR MY 20TH

BIRTHDAY. IN THE TWO YEARS SINCE HIGH SCHOOL THE SOVIET UNION HAS COLLAPSED, HISTORY HAS ENDED, MY OLD L.A. NEIGHBOURHOOD HAS EXPLODED IN RIOTS, SOCIALISTS HAVE BECOME NEOLIBERALS, AND MAX HAS DIED. AND I'M SUPPOSED TO LEARN ABOUT THE SINO-SOVIET SPLIT...

IT IS TIME TO SEEK OUT IDEAS AND EXPLANATIONS TO MAKE SENSE OF THINGS. I START WITH SOCIALISM AND DEVELOPMENT. — HOW DO MOVEMENTS BECOME STATES? HOW DO REVOLUTIONARIES BECOME NEOLIBERALS? AND WHAT WENT WRONG WITH SOCIALISM? CUBA STILL STANDS; CUBA, I DECIDE, REPRESENTS THE PROMISE THAT WENT SO WRONG IN THE EASTERN BLOC. CUBA WILL EXPLAIN IT ALL. FOUR YEARS AND TWO DEGREES LATER, I HAVE A NEW LANGUAGE, NEW CONCEPTS, AND MANY MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS.

The capital, which in itself rests on a social mode of production and pre-supposes a social concentration of means of production and labour-power, is here endowed with the form of social capital...and its undertakings assume the form of social undertakings. It is the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself.

Karl Marx, *Capital* vol. 3, p. 427

[F]reeing the left from the shackles of perspectives-gone-by does not mean ignoring the past, but rather learning what has worked and what has failed – and why.

Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*, p. 316

Procrastinating primates turned into workaholics when researchers suppressed a gene that helps to sense the balance between reward and the work needed to earn it. In the U.S. study, four rhesus monkeys were trained to push a lever in response to a change of colour on a computer screen, for which they received a juice treat as a reward.

Using a new technique, which consisted of injecting a short strand of DNA into the rhinal cortex of the monkey's brain, researchers were able to switch off a gene involved in processing reward signals...In effect, the monkeys became workaholics... Both monkeys and humans tend to procrastinate when they know they have to do more work before getting a reward...

CBC News Online, August 12, 2004

Chapter 1

Through a Class Darkly:

what is capital and how do we overthrow a tension?

what it is and what it ain't – socialism as the inversion of something called capital:

An old joke about Trotskyist parties speaks to diversity of opinion and schism on the left: one person makes a tendency, two a party, three a split. But whatever the differences, conventional left wisdom holds that the aim of working class political organization is something called socialism. Certainly, what that means is more complicated, encompassing everything from the most moderate social-democracy to orthodox Marxism to Stalinism and even, at times, to varieties of fascism. Nonetheless, the continued widespread use of the term suggests that somehow something called socialism holds substantial meaning. And that meaning is an important part of any investigation of the left, both shaping and being shaped by understandings of class and strategies of class organization.

In broad but generally accurate terms, socialism was conceived as an alternative to capitalism, an alternative whose purpose centred upon the elimination of exploitation and the end of class struggle. More than this, however, it was conceived as an economy, a state to be attained, defined by its policies³. Socialism either was or was not; it either 'actually-existed' or was utopian fancy;

³ The term 'state' can be defined in myriad ways, but in these pages, the term is used in two ways. (a) In the Marxist tradition, the state is that collection of bodies charged with the production and maintenance of social order through the promulgation of law, enforced by virtue of a monopoly on violence. (b) In the Foucauldian tradition – itself drawing on Nietzsche – the state may extend into a way of thinking, a logic of command and control, against contingency and uncertainty. Context should suffice to distinguish when the term is used in one or other of these distinct, yet clearly overlapping, notions.

one either stood with socialism or against it. Socialism's involvement in state projects, then, was an accepted feature of the broadly-defined left (with the important exception of anarchists and syndicalists⁴); with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, however, it became clear that the very term had become synonymous with the state project, to the point that legions of stalwart leftists of various stripes stepped forward to recant – if the state has failed, the project has failed, the idea has failed⁵. The analysis can only have been horribly wrong at its core. What remained was to debate which policies could be salvaged and which must be discarded.

However, what was missing in all this was the fundamental stuff critical social theory is made of – dynamics, struggles, tensions, tendencies, relationships. Cuba, for example, - the best known-example of a still-existing socialist state - could be analyzed from a number of perspectives, with fundamentally different conclusions, depending on the definition of socialism employed. As a state born out of revolution, driven by egalitarianism and collectivism, standing alone against the remaining super-power, Cuba clearly passes any 'socialist' test. Detailed examination of policy-making, however, is less clear - through such acts as the criminalization of autonomous working class

⁴ The parenthetical reference to anarchism and syndicalism by no means reflects upon the significance of these and other non-Marxist anti-capitalisms. As will be discussed later, these form a critical part of the left's theoretical and political inheritance, their influence being felt acutely in key moments of struggle. That said, for the bulk of the twentieth century anarchist and syndicalist voices were explicitly marginalized by communists and trade unionists. Though they figure prominently in parts of this thesis, then, they will be referenced explicitly and should not be captured by the more general mainstream left under discussion.

⁵ The best known example on the academic left is 1985's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Laclau and Mouffe. Though more sophisticated than I have expressed it here, this is, in fact, the underlying message of the book. For historical/ political writing in the same vein, see Jorge Castañeda's *Utopia Unarmed* (1993).

movements and the right to strike, the institution of a merit/ demerit system for 'productive' and 'anti-productive' behavior, the centralization of economic decision-making and the strengthening of the country's role as a sugar economy for the world market, Cuba's socialism has, in many respects, seemed to have re-constructed capital's relations within an alternative structure, an alternative system of management with the same basic purpose⁶.

If the defining characteristics of capital are the imposition of work, the creation of value through exploitation and appropriation, and the primacy of exchange over use in the quest for profit, then it is clear that actually-existing socialism's economic logic has been rooted in the logic of capital. Continuing with the Cuban example, throughout its revolutionary process accumulation has remained the state's primary goal, to be achieved by the extension of work and increased production. While egalitarian distribution (use) remained an ideal, Cuba's continued role as a player on the global market made its distributive strategy conditional upon economic growth via increased global exchange. Where accumulation came into conflict with labour rights and equal distribution, exchange was given priority.

In this sense, for all its attempts to transform the structures of exploitation, the way surplus value is extracted (i.e. through state rather than market mechanisms), and the manner in which work is imposed for the extension of capital, the *content* of these structures has remained intact throughout the revolutionary process. Actually-existing socialism transformed property relations, disinheriting the traditional capitalist class and fusing capital with the state. It saw

⁶ For detailed examination of the Cuban example, see Chapter 12.

surplus value extracted through political command rather than the traditional capitalist means of market-determined wages. Where Keynesianism led to the incorporation of a certain stratum of workers into the project of accumulation, Cuban socialism constructed a much more thorough-going system of incorporation. This certainly did provide dramatic gains in workers' standard of living via its approach to the distribution of goods and services. But capital is defined not by property, not by the wage, and not by unequal distribution, which have been the key areas of distinction between capitalism and actually-existing socialism. The underlying relations that *are* definitive of capital - the endless imposition of work, exploitation and appropriation of surplus-value, the accumulation process, the primacy of exchange- over use-value - are precisely what socialism in Cuba and elsewhere has left untouched.

Speaking on the former Soviet Union, István Mészáros notes that arguments focused upon the problems of bureaucracy or liberal democratic mechanisms "miss their intended target by an astronomical distance" (1995: 42). While these may provide important insights into the day to day functioning of state socialism as a political-economic project, such criticisms offer little to our understanding of how capital itself functions in the socialist state. As he argues,

even the complete replacement of the 'bureaucratic personnel' would leave the edifice of the post-capitalist capital system standing, just like the invention of the 'caring capitalist', if by some miracle it were feasible at all, would not alter in the slightest the utterly dehumanizing character of the 'advanced capitalist' capital system...For the substance of the capital relation always retains primacy over the personnel which is its 'juridical embodiment' (Ibid.).

The issue, then, is relationship. And to make sense of how various relationships impact upon a left politics requires a new line of questioning: "an inquiry into the

theoretical inheritance itself in an attempt to understand what happened to it" (Bengelsdorf, 1994: 5-7). Before delving further into the question of state socialism, then, let's take another step back to the conceptual, to the analytical building blocks of the twentieth century left – *capital* and *capitalism* – for just as Marx' bourgeoisie implied its opposite – the working class –, the left's definition of *capitalism* defined its vision of *socialism*.

Capital comes into the world, dripping.....:

If there is a single point from which class theory as we know it begins, it is with conquest and colonization – of the Americas, of Africa, and of the European commons. India and Asia would have their times, certainly; but these came later, only after this new creature capital sharpened its teeth on other prey and bulked up for its bout with its main rival – the massive political-economic system which was the East (Frank, 1998)⁷. The story is a fairly straightforward one, of adventure, theft, murder and power, in which bouts of plundering – later referred to by Marxists as 'primitive accumulation' – created a world in which the vast majority were compelled to labour for the few. Over time, these relationships of

⁷ The character of the predominantly Asian world economy before capitalism has been debated at length, and lies far beyond the scope of this paper. In short, European and American scholars have until very recently painted the pre-colonial non-European world as exotic, dark, and utterly without an economy, whatever praises were heaped upon its artistic and technological achievements by the less Eurocentric of the Eurocentrics. In recent years, however, a substantial amount of scholarly work has drawn our attention to the massive international economy which stretched from China to India to the Middle East and portions of East Africa long before anything called 'Europe' was on the radar. For a particularly compelling read, see Andre Gunder Frank's *Re-Orient* (1998). Crudely summarized, Frank's thesis is that Europe's merchants long sought access to the markets of the rich Eastern economy, but had literally nothing of value to trade. It was only after the plunder of the Americas that Europe effectively bought access to the markets and technology of the East, access which allowed European states to build up military might and armaments over some two hundred years before they were capable of launching the sustained campaign for dominance which ushered in what we now refer to as 'the' world economy.

forced work became normalized, policed less and less by naked force, and more and more by something altogether more invisible and more sinister – a web of relationships of need and desire mediated by a symbol which encapsulated both the earlier plunder and the ever-present possibility of starvation. The web of relationships is referred in economic shorthand as 'the market'; its symbol and the means of negotiating its relationships on a day to day basis, money. The short version?

If Christopher Columbus
Had had a better compass,
And if he hadn't found
His ship had gone aground
Upon this ancient shore
Of Cree and Sioux and more,
Of Inca and of Maya,
Of gold and of papaya,

Then...

No Africa enslaved,
No bloody human trade,
No gold or silver sent
On ships for Europe bent
To fund imperial wars
Of Queens and Emperors...
Who then in debt were tied
To merchants on the side,
Who pressed a cruel demand
To enclose Europe's land
And force from house and home
Poor peasants – sent to roam
In search of land and bread
Til, suitably unfed,
Submitted to regime
Of capital unseen,
Of labour and of works
Overseen by greedy jerks.

Then...

No dark satanic mills,
No factories to fill,
No world run by toil,

No ownership of soil,
No labour up for sale,
No market to prevail,
No growth economy
Convincing us we're free
To sell ourselves each day
To earn some meager pay,
To feed ourselves and so
Another day to go.

Then...

No bucks or cash or bob
Would make me need a job.
I wouldn't have to wake,
The rush hour trip to make.
I wouldn't need to rise,
To force open my eyes.
Instead could stay to rest
My head upon your breast;
At leisure we could wake,
At leisure love to make.

So...

Columbus now I curse
As I search for change in purse.
Columbus I oppose
For these damned working clothes.
Columbus I impeach
For a history unleashed
Which means at work we're stuck
When we could stay home and fuck.

Silliness, yes. But this is basically it⁸ – theft and murder engender certain kinds of relationships which over time become normalized, mediated eventually by something other than the whip or the sword, but with the same effect. Marx (1971), Polanyi (2001) and others tell the story in rich detail, but these rhyming couplets work just as well, and have the added benefit of reminding us that capital is a *process* – not a bank, not a piece of gold, not a structure outside of us, but a web of relationships created and recreated each and every day.

In much Marxist scholarship, the analysis of capital's relations focuses on *property* – in particular, private ownership of the means of production. This approach is central to the Leninist understanding of transition – from capitalism, through socialism, toward communism, via a transformation of property relations – and is basic to all “mainstream” and Leninist varieties of socialism – Trotskyist, Stalinist, Maoist, and even Eurocommunist (McLellan, 1989)⁹. And it is, too, a perspective which interprets Marx above all as economist or political-economist,

⁸ I was pleased to discover that I am not the only one to use verse as a shorthand for serious historical overview; see “Were It Not So: the Viet Nam war in verse” by Edwin Fedder, professor emeritus at the University of Missouri-St Louis.

Bands of guerillas moving with ease
The Rising Sun's oppression a disease
What ho! It's Ho could bring them to their knees.

The full text is available on-line at: <http://www.umsi.edu/services/cis/pdfs/The%Vietnam&War.pdf>

⁹ Orthodox Marxism has traditionally resolved the contradiction between Marx' plural and relationship-based works (in particular *The Grundrisse* and *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*) by distinguishing an ‘early’ and ‘late’ Marx, the latter associated with the more technical and focused works epitomized by *Capital*. Many others, however, have stressed the continuities in Marx, reading the complete body of work in its totality, and noting that distinct emphases in various works are less proof of a changed world-view and more of the particular tasks Marx set himself in his various writings (Heinrich, 2005; Kemple, 1995: 57; McLellan, 1989: 299).

critiquing a specific social structure and positing an alternative arrangement, an interpretation which could only tend towards a policy-based approach to anti-capitalism as well (Cleaver, 1986¹⁰; Heinrich, 2005).

In Marx' theorization, however, property forms do *not* constitute the be-all and end-all of capital. In his framework, private property is a *form* assumed by capital in its pursuit of accumulation; and as form, it can be transformed without altering the fundamental substance of underlying social relations. As István Mészáros notes, it is for good reason that Marx' seminal work is entitled *Capital*, rather than *Capitalism*; it is the relation, rather than the formal structure, which is key (Mészáros, 1995: 938). The point is reiterated by Michael Heinrich (2005) and Thomas Kemple, (1995: 103) both of whom stress Marx' construction of capitalism as an ideal-type, designed not to describe a particular actually-existing order, but rather to illuminate critical social relationships.

In the third volume of *Capital*, for example, Marx explores capital as organized in the joint stock company. Here, the individual capitalist is replaced by a collective owner, and the administration of the enterprise passes into the hands of a manager, who is primarily responsible for the administration of other people's capital (Marx, 1971, vol.3: 427). Capital, then, assumes a *social* form, particularly as related to investment and profit. Ownership is collective, rather than individual; profits are shared among a group of investors; administration of the productive process is overseen not by an owner-capitalist, but by hired

¹⁰ Cleaver's 1986 "Karl Marx: economist or revolutionary?" is a particularly strong but brief overview of how Marx has been constructed by various schools of thought as economist or philosopher, and the impact of these constructions on the interpretations that flow and the kinds of alternative arrangements they imply.

management. Nonetheless, the work relationship and the appropriation of surplus value remain intact; the joint stock company, precursor of a more general social capital, amounts to "the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself" (Marx, 1971, vol.3: 427). Capital has grown beyond the boundaries of the capitalist, beyond the boundaries of specific mechanisms, i.e. privately-owned property, and has begun to emerge as a *social* power, permeating every layer of the society and making every social relation function as a moment of capitalist production (Tronti, 1973: 109; Heinrich: 2005; Hardt and Negri, 1994).

For Marx, then, it is not the form of private property, but rather the combination of the work relation and the accumulation drive which defines capital; indeed, Marx anticipated that the development of capital as *system* (and as social phenomenon) would come into conflict with the interests of individual capitalists, a contradiction which implied "the transformation of the conditions of production into general, common, social conditions" (Marx, 1971, vol.3: 259). Private property, then, was the focus of his attack only in so far as it represented the dominant form of capital at his time of writing; when his attention turned to social forms such as credit, or even to public enterprise, Marx made expressly clear that the focus of his critique was work itself - *that* is capital.

"*Labour*" is the living basis of private property, it is private property as the creative source of itself. Private property is nothing but *objectified* labour. If it is desired to strike a blow at private property, one must attack it not only as a *material state of affairs*, but also as *activity*, as *labour*. It is one of the greatest misapprehensions to speak of free, human, social labour, of labour without private property. "Labour" by its very nature is unfree, unhuman, unsocial activity, determined by private property and creating private property. Hence the

abolition of private property will become a reality only when it is conceived as the abolition of "*labour*" (Marx, 1975: 278-9).

The point is reiterated in Marx' critique of Ferdinand Lasalle's intention to form a workers' political party to seek office in mid-nineteenth century Germany. Marx considered the idea of a party taking state power on behalf of workers to be tantamount to setting up a 'workers' dictator' as long as the fundamental relations remained intact. Indeed, it is interesting to note Marx' prediction of what the result would be, and compare this to what actually emerged in the Soviet Union and other socialist states some decades later. The state, he suggested, would "establish workers' factories, for which the state will put up capital, and by and by these institutions will embrace the whole country" (Marx, "Letter of April 9th, 1863", quoted in Dunayevskaya, 1964: 77). The notion that this approach could achieve communism was thoroughly misguided, as such a socialism retained a critical point of commonality with capitalism: while the party assumed political power, workers would still be at work (Dunayevskaya, 1964: 77).

Rosa Luxemburg elaborated upon this essential distinction between property as physical property and property as alienated labour in the Marxian critique, and in the politics to flow from that critique. To consider private property to be the prime institution of capital, she noted, is to identify capitalists, not capital, as the problem, and focuses the struggle for social change against capitalist distribution treated in isolation, rather than relationships of production and reproduction as a whole. And to limit social analysis to a critique of the distributive effects of capital could only facilitate a shift from revolutionary to reformist discourse, from a position outside of and against capital to one rooted

solidly within the logic of capital. Commenting upon the revisionism of Eduard Bernstein, Luxemburg writes,

by 'capitalist' [he] does not mean a category of production but the right to property. To him, 'capitalist' is not an economic unit but a fiscal unit. And 'capital' is for him not a factor of production but simply a certain quantity of money. By transporting the concept of capitalism from productive relations to property relations...he moves the question of socialism from the domain of production into the domain of relations of fortune - that is, from the relation between capital and labour to the relation between poor and rich" (Luxemburg, 1970: 65).

Luxemburg's point was clear – it is a poor conception of socialism that leaves untouched the fundamental relations of exploitation; such analysis could at best point in the direction of a different model of capital accumulation and a more progressive structure of distribution (Müller and Neusüss, 1975: 24).

Capital, then, is *not* reducible to the wage; capital is *not* reducible to private property. It is, rather, a social relation that can take different forms: the privately-owned firm, the joint stock company, the public enterprise. The critical point is that these very different forms for the organization of production share a relationship common to them all - *alienated and exploited work* - and a common underlying priority - *capital accumulation*. And these common bonds are the substance of capital and its social relations. By separating masses of people from their means of subsistence, by enforcing 'bloody legislation' to impose work and create a class of dispossessed labourers, and by imposing the work relationship and the measurement of labour-time (Alliez, 1996), capital constructs conditions for the reproduction of itself on an ever-expanding scale.

Based on this analysis, the Marxian critique extends beyond the categories of economics to the discipline itself, as is revealed in *Wage Labour*

and Capital, a lecture in which Marx provided in embryonic form the ideas he would later develop in *Capital*. Here Marx moves from the critique of capitalism and its specific workings to a wider discussion, in which the entire discipline of economics and its rationalization of the quest for growth come under attack. "If capital grows, the mass of wage labour grows, the number of wage-workers grows; in a word, the domination of capital extends over a greater number of individuals" (Marx, in Marx and Engels, 1977, vol.1: 163). Growth and development are here indistinguishable from growth and development of *capital*, of precisely the exploitative relation that is the focus of critique. Alienated work is an imposed relation productive of capital, i.e. productive of still more exploitative relations; and the discipline of economics, whose explicit aim is the pursuit of growth, can only be understood as fundamentally part of capital, and in profound opposition to any anti-capitalist politics.

But I am getting ahead of myself. For the practice of anticapitalism and the theories of socialism that inspired the twentieth century left were not based only on an opposition to something called capital; equally important, and intimately related, was that other part of the relationship – not Columbus, but the Arawak; not the fence, but the commons; not the working but the fucking; not the command, but the resistance – the working class.

CLASS AND RACE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

IN ZIMBABWE I LEARNED SOMETHING - THOUGH CLASS COULD HAVE MEANING, IN REAL, UNIVERSAL TERMS, THERE WAS NO UNIVERSAL CLASS INDEPENDENT OF OTHER RELATIONSHIPS. THERE WAS CLEAVAGE, BROKENNESS, CONFUSION AND CONTRADICTION; COMPETING STRUGGLES, COMPETING RELATIONSHIPS THAT COULD NOT BE IGNORED. AND YET, BEHIND IT ALL, THERE LAY THE SAME TENSIONS, THE RESISTANCES, THE SAME DRIVES. CLASS EXISTS. NOT AS A THING TO BE TOUCHED, NOT AS AN IMMUTABLE CHARACTERISTIC OF SPECIFIC PEOPLE, BUT AS A RELATIONSHIP, MADE AND RE-MADE IN DAILY INTERACTIONS.

JULY 1988, AND 120 PEOPLE HAVE DESCENDED UPON LUCIA AND MAX'S HOME IN SHAMU. WE COOK AND EAT TOGETHER, WE SING TOGETHER, WE LAUGH AND HOLD HANDS AND TELL STORIES. AND WE GATHER IN THE TALL SAVANNAH GRASSES TO DISCUSS STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT IN ZIMBABWE AND ANTI-APARTHEID ORGANIZING IN SOUTH AFRICA. MAX INTRODUCES A FEW QUESTIONS. SILENCE. I SPEAK, HOPING TO GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED. THERE IS NODDING OF HEADS, GENERAL ASSENT, AND SILENCE. MAX TRIES ANOTHER QUESTION. SILENCE. I SPEAK AGAIN. NODDING, ASSENT, SILENCE. WHEN WE RETURN TO OUR CHORES, LUCIA AND MAX ASK ME TO HELP THEM WITH FIREWOOD. I AM TOLD, AS PLAINLY AS CAN BE, TO SHUT MY MOUTH OR LEAVE ENTIRELY. LUCIA IS GENTLER. THIS COUNTRY IS LESS THAN A DECADE OUT OF APARTHEID. WE MAY LAUGH AND JOKE AND COOK AND CLEAN TOGETHER, BUT COLOUR MATTERS. UNTIL EVERY PERSON IN THAT CIRCLE WILL CRITICIZE ME, ARGUE WITH ME, I CAN HAVE NO ROLE IN THE DISCUSSION BUT TO LISTEN. I COOK WITH LUCIA, AND MAX

GATHERS THE GROUP AGAIN. I HEAR THE VOICES RISING IN LAUGHTER AND DEBATE.

LUCIA FINDS FOR ME A BOOK OF STEVEN BIKO'S WRITINGS.

STEVEN BIKO, THE YOUNG ANTI-APARTHEID ACTIVIST BANNED, JAILED, KILLED IN 1977 PORT ELIZABETH, HAD BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A THREAT TO THE APARTHEID STATE, AND A PROFOUND THREAT, TOO, TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY AND MANDELA'S AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS. BIKO CHALLENGED BOTH THE RACIALISM OF THE STATE AND THE NON-RACIALISM OF THE SACP/ ANC ALLIANCE, ARGUING INSTEAD FOR SEPARATIST POLITICAL ORGANIZING, NOT AS A PERMANENT SOLUTION, BUT AS A TEMPORARY BUT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY STRATEGY UNTIL SOLIDARITY COULD BE MEANINGFUL ACROSS CLEAVAGES, UNTIL NEW RELATIONSHIPS COULD COMPETE WITH HISTORICAL ONES. IN THE CONTEXT OF APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA, RACE-NEUTRALITY COULD HAVE NO PLACE; WHAT POST-COLONIAL THEORISTS WOULD ARGUE IN THE NEXT DECADE WAS ALREADY AROUND FIRES AND BEER-HALLS AND SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS – CLASS AND RACE ARE DENSELY INTERWOVEN, AND SO LONG AS RACE IS EMBEDDED IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP, COLOUR-BLINDNESS IS PART OF THE PROBLEM. BIKO POINTS OUT THAT WHITE IS A COLOUR.

People habituated to dirt are not easily reclaimed: to promote industry is the only effectual remedy.

Henry Home, *Sketches of the History of Man*, cited in
Thomas (ed.), 1999, p. 81

*Everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must
be kept poor, or they will never be industrious.*

Arthur Young, *The Farmer's Tour Through the East of England*, cited in
Thomas (ed.), 1999, p. 23

*Not until the native learns to produce anything of value in the service
of the higher race, i.e in the service of its and his own progress, does he
gain any moral right to exist.*

Paul Rohrbach, *German Thought in the World*, cited in
Lindqvist, 1996, p. 150

Chapter 2

Making a Working Class:

gender, race, class in labour and labour movements¹¹

Contemporary analyses are without question important; but rooted as they are in existing concepts and discourses, contemporary works cannot reveal the *construction* of those initial discourses, and their reliances on one another. To explore the origins of the language and conceptual framework of class requires something more akin to what Foucault calls the *archeology of knowledge* – “an enquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what space of order knowledge is constituted...” (Foucault, 1970: xxi-xxii). And for notions of class (and gender, and race, as we shall see) one rarely explored but profoundly interesting source of material is centuries-old work on sanitation and civilization – work which sought to articulate basic values of capital’s social order with huge implications for understandings of *work* and *working class* that are with us still.

In his *History of Shit*, Dominique Laporte delves into early legislation (i.e. 1539’s Royal Edict of Villers-Cotterets) regarding sanitation in the emerging urban centers of Europe. Here, as states decreed procedures for the management of waste and sought expertise on the productive uses of waste, Laporte finds a pre-occupation with the cleansing of language – a cleansing, however, which is not merely or even primarily orchestrated for linguistic, hygienic

¹¹ An earlier version of this chapter is published as “A Particular Class of Women: class struggles on the prostitute body, 1830–1900, *Organdi Revue*, no.2, 2001.

or political reasons, but economic ones (Laporte, 2002: 9). That is, waste management involves not simply the management of waste, but more culturally significant functions as well: it provides for initial definitions of 'private' and 'public', introduces state legislation into the previously autonomous family household, seeks to define different standards of cleanliness for residential and commercial zones, provides a central fault-line separating the colonizer from the colonized, makes productive waste property of the state, unproductive waste the responsibility of the individual. In short, sanitation discourse serves as a cultural and linguistic arm of capital's primitive accumulation (Laporte, 2002: 39), uprooting the worker from the earth, marking the boundaries of town and country, public and private, productive and unproductive, civilized and savage, empire and colony, bourgeois and proletarian.

Already by 1539 European states had introduced legislation which would prove central to trajectories of colonialism and political class formation. Over the next 300 years, that discourse would be reproduced, magnified and expanded to provide a complete re-articulation of cultural values consistent with the logic of capital accumulation and rooted in notions of gender, sexuality, race and class that all ultimately referred back to one another and their collective origin in the discourse of sanitation and public health. Michel Foucault has traced these developments as they impacted mental health (1965), scientific discourse and knowledge (1970), criminality/ incarceration (1977), and sexual morality (1978). Anne McClintock, in *Imperial Leather* (1995), has explored in depth how cleanliness defined as whiteness represented European civility, and the ways

both discipline and adoption of European commercial culture were explicitly linked to whitening (McClintock, 1995: 226), and, by extension, inclusion in the 'us' of European capitalism. And in all cases, the discourse of sanitation is central, as public administration declares its responsibility to manage and contain the pest who, "corrupt and dependent on corruption", carries "contamination and foulness to every quarter" (Acton, 1972: 166).

But it is perhaps in prostitution discourse that the class/ race/ gender nexus is at its most clear, rooted firmly in concepts that would be central to the definitions of the *working class* and its unseemly underbelly, the *lumpen*; productivity, self-discipline, restraint – in these we can identify the core concepts of capital's moral-code, the values that would divide free and respectable waged labour from the great unwashed, and the lasting implications of seemingly-irrelevant texts for what was to become the left.

The White Woman as the Bourgeois – the class/ gender/ race nexus in the making of the working class

In large part through the writings of sanitation researchers Alexandre Parent-Duchatelet and William Acton, the legislative texts which they influenced, and the interventions of early feminist activists, the nineteenth century saw a polarization of civilization/ capital/ cleanliness/ whiteness and anarchy/ non-work/ dirt/ blackness. On the one hand stood bourgeois society, associated with thrift and investment, European Christian morality, and the family. The class of this archetype is clearly bourgeois, but there is a working class variant, by which the

most menial labourer – initially only western European, later including colonial subjects - can, through obedience, decorum, and work without complaint, buy his way out of the 'great unwashed'.

To civilize a savage, he must be inspired with new wants and desires...provided that their gratification can be a motive to steady and regular bodily and mental exertion...[to] voluntarily undergo systematic labour, and so acquire or maintain habits of voluntary industry which may be converted to more valuable ends. (Mill, cited in Thomas, ed. [1999]: 30)

My retention of the masculine pronoun in this discussion is by no means accidental, for capital's discourse has its gender as well; though men are defined either as threat or hope, depending on class location, women are constructed as naturally chaste, pure, Christian (Stoler, 1997) – in a word, naturally bourgeois¹². They may join the rabble of men with dirty faces and fierce manners, but do so only by coercion, and once lost are no longer women at all, but prostitutes. In Acton's words,

prostitution is a transitory state through which untold number of British women are ever on their passage...multitudes are mothers before they become prostitutes, and others become mothers during their evil career (Acton, 1972: 49).

This blurring of the line between working class and prostitute was of fundamental importance. Both discourse and enforcement were effective precisely because they were "not fixed or internally coherent; [they were] accommodating and

¹² Curly locks, Curly locks/ Wilt thou be mine?/ Thou shalt not wash dishes/ Nor yet feed the swine,/ But sit on a cushion/ And sew a fine seam, And feed upon strawberries,/ Sugar and cream. Traditional English nursery rhyme.

flexible and could define any woman who transgressed the bourgeois code of morality" (Nead, 1999). In other words, the woman is bourgeois; there is no working class woman, but only the prostitute – she is the working class feminized.

The fluidity that Parent-Duchatelet and Acton found between the identities *prostitute* and *worker* ran both ways, and so too did its implications. On the one hand, if prostitution was a common form of labour in working class communities, then the prostitute herself was to a large extent not specifically *Othered* in the initial discourse. But, at the same time, that fluidity set apart the working class as a whole, 'the great unwashed', from the bourgeoisie, whose moral values, living conditions, leisure activities and forms of congregation were constructed as the norm. It was the working class as a whole that was *Othered*, then, prostitution being a characteristic identified with the class itself.

Capitalism's critics have emphasized that the imposition of the wage as a means of social control was fiercely resisted by newly-made proletarians, and was possible only as a result of enclosure, eviction, criminalization of leisure, and extensive violence - 'bloody legislation' and even bloodier enforcement. And such struggles - of workers against the wage, of the bourgeoisie to justify work by appeal to morality - are embedded throughout these texts: the prostitute who is exemplary of the problem of putting the working class to work; the public houses, which allow congregation for drink and bawdy talk, cultural practices of the uncivilized that demand containment; idlers and ne'er-do-wells who seek "to procure happiness without work" (cited in Bell, 1994: 49) – in short, 'civilization' is

in large part a campaign against working class congregation in public places for sex, drink, raucous conversation and other phenomena which run counter to the bourgeois morality and the requirements of the labour regime.

Thinking a Political Class – marxism's 'worker' takes form:

There is no more central concept to the left – whatever its form, and whatever its preferred terminology – than class. If capital represents a relationship of power then class represents the dynamic tension of this relationship, marked on the one hand by the forces that seek to impose and manage labour for the purposes of accumulation, and on the other by those that are managed. In most Marxist scholarship, the division has been presented in relatively simple terms: ascendant capitalism witnessed the rapid growth of two classes in struggle – the *bourgeoisie* as the human embodiment of the drive to extend capital's relations and accumulate ever-more, and the *proletariat* as the human embodiment of labour.

And so the gospel was preached. But the designation of these two class actors, and the political choices to be made in advancing class struggle, have generated a never-ending stream of debate on the left. In building a movement, who is legitimately proletarian? In identifying the class enemy, who is legitimately bourgeois? And what to do with those who do not fit neatly into one category or other, and how to understand dynamics of social conflict that push against the boundaries of our terminology? These have been profoundly-important questions for both communist and trade-union lefts, raising significant issues for

organization and strategy and generating according to each answer a different set of political challenges and priorities.

The years since Marx have seen massive re-working of the idea of the working class, and repeated attempts to draw boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. As we shall see in the following chapter, already by the time of Lenin's death the project of state-building had set narrow parameters on whose labour was deemed productive by the burgeoning socialist state – i.e., whose labour was managed directly by agents of the state and contributed directly to state coffers. Marx himself cannot be let off the hook so easily – while one may identify a fairly clear break between the non-system communism he articulated and that which arose through state-building, on the question of the working class Marx and his Leninist successors are less-easily distinguished.

As noted, Marx' basic premise held that through the working relationship the processes of appropriation and accumulation were internalized, normalized, and over time made invisible. And, too, Marx took some care to distinguish the relationship *capital* from both its political-form, *capitalism*, and its human embodiment, *the capitalist*. His work on the other side of this equation, however, is substantially less-developed both in extent and sophistication.

Facing the capitalist in the embodiment of the capital relation is Marx' worker, the *proletarian*. Characterized by a need to sell his [sic]¹³ own labour-power for wages to subsist, the worker of Marx' scheme is defined not by any

¹³ I have retained the masculine pronoun at this stage to reflect the gender bias in the classical Marxist formulation of *the worker*. I will argue later that Marx's proletariat can and must be considered in fairly expansive terms, and certainly a host of scholars from feminist and Third World traditions have written extensively and convincingly on this, as we shall see in later pages. At this point, however, dealing as we are with the limits of Marx's own articulation of the class actor, the use of the masculine underscores the 'ideal-type' worker that emerged in his writings.

quality pertaining to the individual, but by his standing in relation to capital. E.P. Thompson expresses the point well when he notes that class is not even a category, but "something that in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships" (Thompson, 1980: 8). That is, neither capitalist nor worker exists except in relation to the other – these roles are always and only a function of their relationship; class definitions are ideal-types for the purposes of understanding social interactions, and 'class' an analytical shorthand for a real social tension.

While Marx did, then, write the working class as a relation rather than an identifiable mass (Kemple: 1995: 125), an unintended consequence of his 'ideal-type' analysis comes into clear view with his definition of productivity. Economic productivity can only be, in Marx's framework, productivity for capital; the worker is made such by participation in the wage relationship, a relationship whose very purpose is the growth of capital and the political expansion of capital's relations. That is, to be 'productive' requires that the worker is productive to capital, and on capital's terms. And capitalist productivity, as we have seen, is a value-laden concept which implies a modicum of obedience, thrift, and cooperation with the aims and objectives of the capitalist enterprise. Significant, then, is who is *not* included in capital's working class, and – by extension – who is excluded, and how, from the political working class Marx envisions as the basis for socialism.

If one reads Marx in strictly economic terms – a logical consequence of the fact that he completed his work on capital but never wrote the volume on

wage-labour¹⁴ - a list of excluded actors emerges practically without end. Some – for example agricultural small-holders who intermittently work for wages – fairly immediately came to the attention of socialist organizers as an ‘in-between’ category that must somehow be accounted for. Others - such as women and children labouring unpaid in the home and slaves and indentured labourers who worked without wages but in clearly capitalist enterprises – remained invisible in the theoretical framework for far longer, only becoming acknowledged as class subjects a century later. And significantly, too, was a group excluded not by omission or oversight, but by an explicitly-articulated failure to submit to capital and adopt values conducive to enterprise. Enter the *lumpenproletariat* – those whose class exclusion was based on their own failings.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*, Marx applies the term *lumpenproletariat* to “the refuse of all classes” – in truth, however, those who if engaged in other activity could only be proletarians: “swindlers, confidence tricksters, brothel-keepers, rag-and-bone merchants, organ-grinders, beggars and other flotsam of society” (Marx, 1983, vol. 1: 442). In other words, the lumpen is comprised of criminals, prostitutes, gamblers, and those unemployed who are not actively seeking and suitably prepared for waged labour. It is curious that this category is defined by Marx in a manner totally at odds with his other conceptualization – membership in the lumpen is a moral assignment, as the examples of beggars and prostitutes make clear. That is, unemployment itself is

¹⁴ That Marx intended to explore the dynamics of working class formation and struggle is without question. Kemple (1995), Lebowitz (1992) and Negri (1991 [1979]), for example, all devote extensive space to the theoretical and political implications of the ‘missing book on wage-labour’. But it is also without question that Marx did define his working class by its productivity, and the long-term exclusions generated by this marker cannot be blamed solely on what was *not* written, but also what was.

no cause for exclusion from the proletariat – potential workers are deemed a non-working proletariat, the ‘reserve army of labour’, prepared to sell their labour power but temporarily prevented from doing so. That is, it is not only conceivable but likely that individuals will pass through stages of employment and unemployment, and such transitions do not result in any analytical or political ‘de-classing’. Likewise prostitutes work for wages, but are excluded on the basis of the *type* of work they do, and its objectionable morality in relation to broader social values. It cannot be said that the reason for the exclusion is that prostitutes perform a service rather than producing a commodity – the same would be equally true for all manner of workers whose class membership is without question. In both cases, then, it is moral judgment that defines assignment to the lumpenproletariat – and a moral judgment lifted directly from capital’s own definitions of productivity and civility as previously discussed.

More curious still is the contradiction between Marx’ dismissal of the lumpenproletariat on the very grounds that he celebrates resistance to proletarianization to begin with. As mentioned previously, Marx pays a good deal of attention – in the latter portions of *Capital* – to the process of primitive accumulation, and the lengths to which state and capital had to go to impose the discipline of the wage and thereby create a productive working class. Begging, banditry, sloth, prostitution – in the ascension of capital these are recognized as moments of refusal, as acts of resistance to becoming-worker, stressed to show that the values and morality of capital are by no stretch natural but had to be created and imposed by force. Fast-forward two centuries and those who

continue to resist the wage are discarded as 'dregs'; there is no attempt to distinguish certain acts as damaging to the formation of working class unity or misdirected crime – i.e. targeted at other workers; rather we see a wholesale condemnation of significant numbers of people on the basis they have not adequately internalized capital to be candidates for revolutionary action.

What we see in Marx, then, is a disjuncture in the treatment of certain class actors between his writings on the rise of capital as system and his work on its period of dominance. In his discussions of primitive accumulation and the making by force of a proletariat, Marx notes in no uncertain terms the violence and repression required to establish a culture of wage labour and a mass submission to the wage-relationship. With some glee Marx notes the resistance to the wage, and includes extensive reference to the criminalization of non-work as a fundamental component of capitalist strategy. And yet in discussing the working class generally Marx not only explicitly links class to the formal wage and productivity for capital, which could be explained as an analytical focus on the dominant form of exploitation at the time, but in fact takes pains to exclude those capital deems 'non-productive' or 'backward' – domestic workers, wives and mothers, agricultural workers, and the unemployed, the latter being divided among a derided *lumpenproletariat* of criminals, drunks and delinquents and a more sympathetically-framed 'reserve army'.

Already in Marx, then, we see a contradictory treatment of the working class – it is or is becoming universal, it is brought into existence by force, and exerts its own force to resist that making, it is shaped by the imposition of a wage

system and a capitalist definition of 'productive' as productive of profit for capital. And yet these terms are precisely what Marx himself adopts in his articulation of the revolutionary class. It is a class whose boundaries Marx draws directly from capital's own definitions of propriety – and a class, as a result, which would run directly into its exclusions anywhere and everywhere class struggle jumped from the page to the street, the field, the home or the factory.

As previously noted, certain groups not captured by Marx' general definition of working class drew attention earlier than others. In the 1890s Karl Kautsky considered the status of agricultural workers. Noting that the proletariat generally included all those who "live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital" (Marx and Engels, 1983, vol.1: 114), Kautsky re-emphasizes the *relationship* to work as the defining factor in capitalism, and the fact that working class relationships with capital may be established long before the wage is the sole, or even predominant, form of subsistence (Kautsky, 1988: 18). Speaking of the peasant household, Kautsky cautions Marxists who are quick to seek all answers in the wage, noting that non-wage subsistence may be transformed rather than eliminated by capital, and that the peasant household need not be incompatible with immersion in the capitalist world economy (Ibid. 170 and 179).

This was not, however, the last word on the subject by any means. With the rise of socialism to state-power in 1917 Russia, the theoretical and conceptual debates took on a new urgency within the Bolshevik party. Kautsky's perspective - that capital was not yet sufficiently developed in Russia to sustain a

proletarian revolution – was condemned as narrow economism by Lenin and his circle. There is an extent of contradiction in Kautsky, suggesting as he does that the peasant/ proletarian lines are never neat while arguing that revolution in Russia is premature given the underdeveloped working class and the impossibility of a peasant/ proletarian alliance (Kautsky, 1988). But the conception of socialism that emerged within the Bolsheviks over the following two decades indicated that that Party, too, had indeed envisioned a working class centred upon the wage and the factory, and saw as its mandate the acceleration of full-fledged proletarianization, at incredible cost. First Trotsky then Stalin led the charge to collectivize agriculture (McLellan, 1989: 116) – though not on the grounds of existing peasant communities as described by Kautsky and contemplated even by Marx himself¹⁵ - with devastating human results and a lasting widespread theoretical impact on how class would be conceived in Marxist-Leninist writings for decades to come.

Globalizing the Class – the challenge of third world Marxism:

While Europe's communists defended and secured the borders of the working class as part of a state-building project, an entirely different revolutionary subject was being written on what has been called the periphery – spaces populated largely by those excluded from the Leninist core. This anti-colonial, anti-imperialist challenge analyzed capital as it operated outside the factory walls,

¹⁵ In several drafts of a letter to Vera Zasulich, Marx takes pains to stress that his theory is intended as a general conception based on the Western European example, and should not be interpreted as a set of laws. In fact, Marx directly considers the possibility that the Russian peasant community – or *mir* – may be the blueprint for socialism in that country. See Rosemont, 1989.

and began to interrogate the race (and to a lesser extent the gender) of class relationships and the class content of culturally-generalized oppressions.

The two above-mentioned trajectories of the class war in Europe - enclosure of public space and legislative sanctions to create a working class dependent upon the wage, and the moral mission targeted against working class congregation generally and women in particular - mirrored similar campaigns waged with even greater ferocity in the colonies and would-be colonies. Here the discourses of sanitation and civilization permeated the culture wars, both to enforce European-ness as progress in 'the field' and to set apart the newly-'civilized' (and newly-'white') European working class from the backward and frankly 'savage' practices of each new target of colonization.

Noel Ignatiev, founder of the journal *Race Traitor* and a central figure in the growing field of whiteness studies, has written extensively on the ways successive waves of workers were 'elevated' from being 'of colour' to being 'white', both as they were more formally incorporated into the ranks of 'productive' labour and as more-recent conquests were brought in to fill the categories of wild and untameable (Ignatiev, 1995). As the domestic working class stepped from rabble to workingmen, Irish, Jewish, Polish and Italian workers took over the position of the unmanageable before they too won entry to whiteness (Cohen, 1997; Twine, 1997), and stepped up to police the borders of the working class from incursion by Africans, Caribbeans, Indians and mestizos. The lines of race were carefully crafted, successive waves of cultural production and legislation adjusting, re-naming and shifting these boundaries, but retaining

at all times the borders themselves (Frankenberg, 1997; Twine, 1997). Over centuries the players changed, but the game remained – the workingman was a law-abiding citizen, keen to produce for a modest paypacket, while most who worked were slaves, indentured servants, criminals, vagabonds, as much a threat to the reputation and livelihood of the honest worker as to anyone else (Roediger, 2005)¹⁶.

That racialization, including whiteness, is not a fact but a political and cultural construct which moves and shifts as various dynamics of command and resistance are played out is by now almost common-sense in the academic setting (Frankenberg, 1993 and 1997; Ignatiev, 1995; McClintock, 1995; Miles, 1989; Said, 1994; Stoler, 1997; Winant, 1997; Zamudio and Rios, 2006). Such was not always the case, however, and it was from the anti-colonial voices within the larger socialist movement that the first volleys were shot in the war on the working class as inherently white.

In Peru, José Mariátegui (1971) read Marx in Quechua, identifying indigenous struggles as the fundamental social conflict of the region and indigenous collective lands and collective work as the starting point for an agricultural communism¹⁷. In the 1940s, Mao led the first successful explicitly socialist peasant-based revolutionary force, a development which was to have enormous implications for the left in years after. And from the Caribbean and still-colonized Africa exploded a Marxism imbued with anti-racist and anti-colonial

¹⁶ For more in-depth discussion of the changing boundaries of whiteness, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*; Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black*; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; and Thomas Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*.

¹⁷ See Mariátegui, Jose, 1971 [1928]. *The Problems of the Indian: seven interpretive essays on Peruvian reality*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

rage, and which would confront directly the Leninist notion that these struggles were somehow backward or bourgeois, to be subsumed within the larger project of proletarian revolution. Mariátegui and Mao had expanded the ranks of the Communist Party to nurture the revolutionary potential they saw within the peasantry; these others, Frantz Fanon among them, turned the relationship on its head.

In contrast to Mao and orthodox Leninism, Fanon did not accept the view that the Communist Party leads the revolution, but believed that the revolutionary party grew from the struggle which, in the African context, could not only add in a peasant contingent, but must in fact only emerge from these ranks. While as a Marxist Fanon argued that a non-socialist anti-colonial struggle would simply replace white masters with a black African bourgeoisie trained by Europeans, he devoted considerable attention to the question of race, articulating a dialectical analysis of blackness/ whiteness that extended from individual and collective identity to formal political strategy. With *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skins White Masks*, Fanon argued that only a revolution based in the countryside, and led by the rural population rather than the Western-educated urban black intelligentsia, could unleash a movement thorough enough to not only end colonial rule, but entirely do away with the categories of black and white and the system of binary classification on which the colonial enterprise rested (Fanon, 1963 and 1967)¹⁸.

¹⁸ I have emphasized here the expressly political thrust of Fanon, but it should be noted his analysis involved considerable attention to consciousness and identity. Sandoval (1997) provides a discussion of how Fanon analyses racial consciousness among the colonized, drawing parallels

For the first half of the twentieth century, Marxists had held together on the matter of working class composition, Stalinist and Trotskyist variants together defending the faith against incursions from the colonial upstarts. By mid-century, however, the tide was rapidly turning, as anti-colonial rebellion swelled and a Third World socialism hit the stage, led by Mao Tse-Tung's Chinese Communist Party and followed a decade later by the ragtag Cuban militia led by Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Ché' Guevara. Together, the Chinese and Cuban examples suggested that socialist revolution could emerge from the peasantry, with only limited involvement by the classically-defined proletariat. Theoretical modifications followed, rehabilitating the peasantry as a potentially-revolutionary class able - under the right conditions, and with the right (read *Party*) leadership - to skip the transition to wage labour (Tse-Tung, 1967: 23).

The impact was explosive; all manner of post-colonial socialisms exploded in theory and struggle as the communist left shifted (somewhat uncomfortably) to make room for the newcomers. Debate raged for decades as to the ultimate revolutionary potential of these non-'worker' allies. James Scott and Samuel Popkin debated whether the peasantry as a class was inherently 'moral' (Scott, 1976) or politically 'rational' (Popkin, 1979) in outlook, thereby impacting whether and how peasant rebellions could be understood in the context of larger struggles for socialism. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), Andre Gunder Frank (1969), Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1979), Samir Amin (1974 and 1977) and

to Roland Barthes work on white consciousness and colonization, particularly his 1957 *Mythologies*.

Walter Rodney (1981)¹⁹, to name only a few, challenged the dominance of the European industrial-working class model of socialist struggle, producing historical and theoretical works emphasizing the role of plunder and conquest in Europe's inimitable capitalist development. Régis Debray, theoretical guide and advisor to Cuba's revolutionaries, and one-time fighter alongside Ché Guevara, quite explicitly dismissed the role of the Communist Party and indeed the traditional working class, arguing instead that revolution could best be fomented among largely rural populations for whom capitalist command represented an active *undevelopment* (Debray, 1970). And Ché himself entered the fray literally explosively, applying Debray's theory of small *foco*-based guerilla warfare to Bolivia and the Congo in direct opposition to Leninist orthodoxy and Soviet directive.

The impact was explosive, particularly in the wake of Cuba's successful revolution and Viet Nam's defeat of the United States. Through the military victories of agricultural populations in the former colonies and extensive analytical and theoretical work by intellectuals working in close alliance with those rebellions, it was, by the late 1970s, generally accepted that agricultural workers, waged or unwaged, formed a substantial part of the anti-capitalist movement.

¹⁹ See Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (1974); Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1969); Cardoso, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (1979); Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale* (1974) and *Unequal Development* (1977); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1981).

The Woman as Worker – theorizing the production of producers:

The ranks of the left's vanguard having been expanded rapidly to incorporate hundreds of millions of people in the colonies and former colonies, an equally important play was about to be made – this one welcomed not nearly as warmly. In the 1960s and 1970s, as feminism's so-called 'second wave' burst in Europe and North America, women activists interrogated basic economic notions from 'productivity' to 'labour' with a view to carrying class theory beyond its gendered boundaries, or challenging the primacy of class altogether, sometimes seeking parity for race and gender, sometimes positing gender as primary instead.

Numerous theoretical categories have been posited to describe the political and scholarly work which arose from the feminist struggles of the 1970s. Radical feminism, as it is termed, broke first; best exemplified by Shulamith Firestone, whose *The Dialectic of Sex* (1971) challenged the primacy of class oppression, arguing instead that the first and foundational oppression was of men over women. With Beverly Jones and Judith Brown (1968) and others, Firestone's work became highly influential in feminism's second wave, not only inspiring the now-famous consciousness-raising groups and placing front and centre the problem of violence against women, but also forcing the traditional left to deal with gender in a more meaningful way. That response, though, was itself by no means monolithic.

The left's more 'internal' grappling with feminism took two main approaches. Marxist feminists like Gayle Rubin (1975) acknowledged the failure of the left to adequately address questions of gender, but stopped short of finding

any fatal flaws with the basics of socialist class theory. Socialist feminists went further, reacting against both the practice of chauvinism within the left and the tendency of Marxists to treat 'the woman question' as something at best added on or secondary to the class struggle, at worst a distraction from the serious work of revolution. In what is perhaps the most famous statement of this school, Heidi Hartmann notes in her "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism" that "Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism" (1981: 2). Attempting to carve a middle ground between radical and Marxist feminisms, Hartmann, Lise Vogel (1987), Michèle Barrett (1980) and others seriously interrogated the poverty of class theory with respect to issues of gender while maintaining that class and gender analyses, though not reducible to one another, were indeed compatible. As Hartmann states it, "Capitalist development creates the place for a hierarchy of workers, but traditional Marxist categories cannot tell us who will fill which places" (Ibid.). By drawing gender and race in at this point (as explicitly critical, yet still arguably secondary to class, in conceptual if not temporal terms) socialist feminists sought to broaden Marxism's explanatory power while legitimizing enquiry beyond strictly economic boundaries.

One particularly important intervention in this debate, however, emerged out of a split in the European Trotskyist movement, and the campaign to organize housewives in particular. Mariarosa Dalla Costa's *Women and the Subversion of Community* (1973) explores domestic labour, housewifization and social reproduction as fundamental moments in the process of capital. Exploitation of women is not a consequence of capitalism, she argues, but is both constitutive of

and reconfigured by capital so that the productive work of women is masked by their unwaged and isolated status; in marriage, sex, child-rearing and domestic work, capital's most important commodity - labour-power - is reproduced. This gendered division of labour is unchallenged by Marxist orthodoxy, which fails to recognize the reproduction of labour-power as the pivotal moment in the production process - production of that one commodity - labour - upon which all others depend.

Dalla Costa suggests that Marxists and feminists have both contributed to a theoretical schism that at best holds exploitation and oppression firmly apart, and at worst competes to identify one or other power relation as primary. The left has defined 'class' in exclusively male terms, with the result that women are either incidental or antagonistic to the struggle against capital. Feminists, for their part, have largely reproduced narrow interpretations of class, with the result that they either defer feminist struggle to a post-capitalist future or abstract 'oppression' from 'exploitation' and restrict themselves to a psychological and cultural terrain.

Neither approach, argues Dalla Costa, is sufficient. Women's struggle must be autonomous precisely because the wage struggles of men are conditional upon the unwaged labour of women, and because the man in the home operates as the overseer and immediate beneficiary of that unwaged labour. But where divorced from class, such a strategy implies only a cultural liberation, and tends to alter the terms of, rather than subvert, the exploitation of women's labour. If, however, in its political organization the left recognizes

autonomy and makes room for contradiction, feminist struggles can play an enormous role. The struggles of the housewife, in illustrating that the sphere of 'community' is not one of freedom but of unwaged work, focus attention upon the relationships between capitalist production and the production of social life, between the factory and the community, allowing us to see capital in homes and streets and public spaces, and how intimate human relationships operate within commodity production. That is, the housewife explodes the myth that private and public are separate spheres, or that production and reproduction are in any way distinct.

Dalla Costa's contribution remained marginal on the left, coming as it did from a circle of activists critical of and outside of the three major trajectories of the twentieth century left - Stalinist, Trotskyist, and social democratic. It would only be decades later, with the collapse of Marxist orthodoxy, that she would become recognized as a major contributor to the tradition of 'open' Marxism or 'left-communism', her influence being seen in works of such contemporary analysts as Maria Mies (1986) and Silvia Federici (2004).

Complexities of Class – Marxism confronts structure, subject and plurality:

On questions of anti-racism, the peasantry and gender, the concept of *working class* was opened as a result of political pressure from allies and potential allies. Still more challenging, at least as far as Marxist orthodoxy was concerned, were the theoretical revisions born not of rebellion but of political moderation and the expansion of capital beyond individually-owned property to various forms of

collective ownership – both private and state. In particular, professional scholars sought to make political sense of a class structure whose relationships seemed infinitely more complex than Marx had envisioned, and who seemed to pose a serious political problem for the vanguard.

The re-deployment of class in terms other than 'productivist' has a long history; indeed, it was within the German Social Democratic Party, in debates made famous by Rosa Luxemburg and Eduard Bernstein, that the discussion emerged regarding the tension between class as a relation of production and class as an income-based distinction. Later, innumerable Marxist analysts confronted the problems of class mobility and/ or class plurality, from the theorists of the Frankfurt school, who turned increasingly to matters of ideology and culture (Anderson, 1979), to structuralists such as Louis Althusser (Althusser, 1979; Althusser and Balibar, 1979) and Nicos Poulantzas, who resolved the problem by simply discarding real history as irrelevant to what they considered Marx' scientific schema²⁰, to the now-famous-on-the-left debates sparked by 'culturalist' Marxists Stuart Hall and E.P. Thompson, who led an all-out attack on those who did not place history, human agency and class identities at the centre of Marxist analysis (Magarey, 1987).

A substantial part of the debate revolved around questions of free will or determinism, the relation between class and ideology, and whether or not Marx had indeed ever distinguished a 'class-in-itself' from a 'class-for-itself' – that is,

²⁰ Both Althusser and Poulantzas made contributions to Marxism that seemed to contradict or at least throw into question their emphasis on Marxism as science. Althusser's work on 'overdetermination' and 'relative autonomy' have both influenced thinkers outside of and even openly hostile to structuralism generally (McLellan, 1989). And Hall (1980) gives considerable attention to Poulantzas' later reconsiderations and an increasing openness to alternative conceptions.

class as an object of (predominantly economic) analysis vs. class as a conscious political actor, ostensibly with a clear ideological bent²¹. Like Thompson, Adam Przeworski argued that classes were made in the course of human interaction, and that to distinguish between the political and the economic was to reinforce a vulgar determinism (Przeworski, 1977); Hal Draper (1977) and G.A. Cohen (2000), for their part, defended and elaborated upon the distinction, positing that the structural construction of the class as a mass of people necessarily prefigured that class' political formation as a social subject with a specific consciousness of itself. It was a debate that had antecedents in Georg Lucács' (1972) and Antonio Gramsci's (1971) contributions on the relationship between ideology and class, and would rage within the left long after the key players fired their shots (Andrew, 1983). And indeed it echoes to this day in debates on strategic concepts from *hegemony* to *revolution*²² (Day, 2005), and on what class might mean in the context of today's managerial capitalism. Enter Erik Olin-Wright, theorist of class plurality.

Fair to Middling - the notion of the middle class, and class theory without the proletariat:

²¹ The critical passages in Marx' own work were drawn from two sources - a discussion in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in which the peasantry is defined as a class by virtue of its economic commonalities and yet not a class given its lack of a common political identity, and the following quotation from *The Poverty of Philosophy*: "Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is already thus a class against capital, but not yet for itself" (Marx and Engels, 1983, vol. 1).

²² See Chapter 7 for discussion on how the debate over class continues today.

Olin-Wright argues that class is best understood as several distinct but related factors, including productive relations, income distribution, status (or what post-structuralists call 'social capital'), and autonomy in the labour process (Wright 1997 and 1989). Skipping over the gory details, he argues against a Weberian approach to class which potentially sees classes in competition as infinite, and yet posits as a conclusion something which takes us almost to the same place – an understanding of class location as potentially contradictory so that individuals may occupy multiple categories. That is, according to Wright, one may be productively working class, culturally middle class, and economically upper class. The formulation would at first blush appear common-sensical, and indeed Wright does help us focus attention on the potentiality of multiple (and messy) class relations. It is intuitive, however, only if the notion of class is analytically fractured to encompass simultaneously a productive class structure (the typical bourgeoisie and proletariat) and a distributive (and cultural) one of lower, middle, and upper classes. And once that analytic step has occurred, the concept of class has already lost any clear and discrete meaning, and any distinction with the Weberian approach seems a matter of shading.

Wright was by no means the first to seek a more nuanced approach to class analysis; Daniel Bell (1973), Pierre Bourdieu (1990), Anthony Giddens (1971), Alvin Gouldner (1979), and John Urry (1995), to name only a few, have attempted similar projects. Wright, however, has been a significant voice in a field otherwise dominated in recent history by post-structuralist and post-Marxist thinkers rooted in the challenge of so-called new social movements, and the

generalized left despair after 1989 – but that discussion will await a further chapter, and a little more history.

The question of class, then, is a complicated one, hugely controversial on the left and hugely important for questions of organization and strategy. For all the debates, however, the various schools share a common assumption, and one which entirely fails to address the left's ability to cope in the years since the Soviet collapse. What Stalin, Trotsky, Mao, Wright, and so many others share is a delineation of class boundaries by reference to identifiable groups, rather than relationships in general – a slippage which in turn places the focus more upon distribution or ideology (class consciousness, in the official lingo) than the process of production and the appropriation of surplus value. But it is not a surprising slippage, for that. Indeed, this argument about who and what is a worker originates in the very ascendance of capital as a defining relationship of the social order, and the processes of violence that defined productivity, defined the workplace, and defined the basic terms of economic management.

The problem, then, remains: how did the making of the working class, its initial exclusions and subsequent piece-meal inclusions, set the social democratic and Marxist lefts on particular organizational trajectories? How, in other words, does the making of class as concept impact its shape organizationally and strategically? There is a massive amount of scholarly work on the construction of the working class as a productive and political force – Adam Przeworski's "Proletariat into a Class" (1977), E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1980), Richard Biernacki's *The Fabrication*

of *Labor* (1995), and Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg's edited collection, *Working Class Formation* (1986) all delve deep into the processes by which various 'working classes' as political and conceptual creatures have been shaped.

But for our immediate purposes, the critical issue is who has been *excluded* from that working class, and how these exclusions derive precisely from capital's own designations of who is deemed productive, whose work is worthy of wage. And, on the other, who is deemed too lazy, too unproductive, too aggressive – or perhaps too *transgressive* – to be claimed by left intellectuals or a working class movement with a particular political project.

Workers and Vanguard – the ideal-type worker of the labour-left:

For all its meanderings, this road from nineteenth century texts and through decolonization, the second wave of feminism and the rise of post-Marxism is critical to understanding the contemporary left; for the terminology we employ today to make sense of 'the working class', and the notions of work vs idleness, rule of law vs anarchy which underpin the industrial relations regime – these all have their origins in a discourse of cleanliness and civility, a discourse which produced on the one hand professionals, citizens, ladies, and on the other "vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes" (Marx, 1971, vol.1: 643) – a "dangerous class" whose 'coarse' language and humour, bawdy festivity and raucous public gatherings are symbolic of its hostility to being made a labouring class (Nead:

1999: n7). And that original discourse, racialized and gendered as it was²³, left a legacy which still forms the basis of our industrial relations regime and its principal organizations – a definition of *the worker* as a white, male, fully-employed, citizen, motivated by pride in his work, loyalty to his country, faith in his God; or, in more modern parlance, the responsible worker, who has fully internalized his duty to labour, in whom external control is replaced by “the stricter, more exacting and more effective control from the inside” (Drucker, 1954: 135). This is *the worker* given to us by sanitation researchers, public policy, and colonizers; and despite an analytic recognition - from Marx through the communist and social democratic lefts through welfarist capitalism – that the lay-about, the drunk, and the prostitute are products of a social order, in political terms this productive and morally-upstanding worker is, too, the worker of the trade union movement and of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy.

Consider, for example, W.E.B. DuBois, Marxist, black liberationist, anti-colonialist, but who mirrored similar sentiments in his own work as he divided the ‘good’ black worker from ‘the dregs’. His *Philadelphia Negro Study* (1899) spends a good deal of time distinguishing the “better class of Negroes...hardworking, law-abiding” from “the lowest class of criminals, prostitutes and loafers”, and those around them, “young idlers...shiftless and lazy ne’er-do-wells...and a rough crowd of pleasure seekers and libertines”. The ‘lowest classes’ – as in the sanitation and state texts – are accused of “sexual looseness...their greatest

²³ For a particularly telling example, see Ford, 2006. Here the author relates the story of the lengthy court-case that ensued when a pay was withheld from a farm worker in 1929 Australia after the manager suspected (correctly) that the ‘man’ he had employed was biologically a woman.

vice", whereas the 'working' Negroes, the productive ones, the responsible ones "get their amusement in connection with the churches" (DuBois, 1899).

The left, then, echoed in its own discourse capital's own constructions of responsible and irresponsible workers, with major political implications, as seen in the substantial overlap between DuBois' construction of the working class and that relied upon by mainstream labour, often in the latter case specifically to exclude black workers and women from joining trade unions (Cutler and Aronowitz, 1998: 10-11). AFL-CIO President Sam Gompers, for example, decried those "undisciplined negroes who were intoxicated by higher wages" for which they were "totally unfitted" (cited in Buhle, 1999: 80), using precisely the distinctions employed by DuBois to write the good worker. And it was a distinction with staying-power, still employed by labour's official representatives decades later, during the rebellion of the late 1960s, to justify their alliance with capital and state against the growing influence of "black ingrates", "pansies" and "women yelling about equal rights" (Buhle, 1999: 223).

But nowhere is the left's adherence to capital's own definition of working class more transparent than in the class discourse of the Soviet Union, as the project of state-building gave rise to socialism's own variant of 'the good citizen'. The Bolsheviks developed the designation 'vanguard worker' - defined by "sobriety, industry, thrift" (Soviet trade union publications, cited in Steinberg: 81) - to be reserved for those select few who embodied socialist principles - principles, above all else, of order, obedience, and work. Those "less conscious" and in need of either guidance or more direct punishment, exhibited

"drunkenness and other unseemly behaviour" – which could range from failure to achieve production quotas to disrespect for workplace managers to homosexuality to adultery (Ibid). The idea of the vanguard worker has been important for the left, inspiring similar designations with intensive public advertising campaigns in China, North Korea, and Cuba, where 'unseemly behaviour' would at times be deployed so broadly as to include affection for jazz music and untrimmed facial hair.

In short, the left's own conceptualization of what constitutes the working class – and its distinction from the untamed, resistant rabble – built directly upon, and was virtually indistinguishable from that which fed and was fed by capital's own rise as order, discipline, hygiene, and work. As Victoria Bonnell (1994) notes in her study of worker iconography in Soviet art, a fundamental piece of the state-building process was the making of this ideal-type socialist worker - white, male, brawny, celebrating the pure joy of productivity with "vigor, freshness and enthusiasm" (366). And of course, with the construction of the vanguard worker comes the equally-important construction of its opposite - the idler, the layabout, the drunk, the whore, and all those who incarnate the profoundly counter-revolutionary crimes of "inefficiency, nonproductivity, and low productivity" (Castro, cited in Mesa-Lago, 1981: 132-3). This curious process goes to the heart of the traditional left, such that Marxism's most basic goal, the classless society, comes, in political terms, to be considered "a problem, not a solution, created by socialism" (Castro, cited in Eckstein, 1994: 56).

UTOPIAS IN PRACTICE – NICARAGUA 1985, CUBA 1993

NICARAGUA, 1985, AND I AM WALKING DOWN TO THE GOVERNMENT SHOP TO PICK UP THIS WEEK'S RATIONS OF RICE, BEANS, MILK, AND SOAP. INSTEAD, ALL I SEE IS EGGS. STACK UPON STACK, CARTON AFTER CARTON OF EGGS FROM FLOOR TO CEILING, WITH A NOTE SCRAWLED ON A PIECE OF CARDBOARD SAYING SOMETHING TO THE EFFECT THAT THESE ARE A GIFT FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY PEOPLE OF CUBA TO THEIR NICARAGUAN COMRADES TO ASSIST IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST YANKEE IMPERIALISM. I FALL IN LOVE WITH CUBA AT THAT MOMENT, AND PROMISE MYSELF THAT ONE DAY I WILL SEE THAT MOST INSPIRING OF REVOLUTIONS FOR MYSELF.

I'LL WAIT MANY YEARS TO KEEP THAT PROMISE, BUT IN 1993 THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF AS THE SFU LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES THAT ITS ANNUAL FIELD SCHOOL WILL VISIT HAVANA AND PROVIDE STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO STUDY AT THAT CITY'S THREE HUNDRED YEAR OLD UNIVERSITY AND LIVE IN A UNIVERSITY HOME IN A TYPICAL SUBURBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD.

CUBA AMAZES ME. HERE THE HEROES OF ANGOLAN INDEPENDENCE, STRUGGLES AGAINST APARTHEID, AND THE NICARAGUA OF MY CHILDHOOD STARE AT ME FROM POSTAGE STAMPS AND BILLBOARDS. CHE IS EVERYWHERE WATCHING OVER THE CITY, EXHORTING US TO VOLUNTEER TO HARVEST SUGAR IN ORIENTE PROVINCE, DEFUSE LAND MINES IN MOZAMBIQUE, TEACH AND LEARN IN NORTH KOREA AND VIET NAM. BUT THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE, HERE, TOO – A SHOCKING INEQUALITY THAT ONLY APPEARS WHEN I LEAVE MY GIRLFRIEND JENY'S HOME, WITH ITS BLACK BEANS AND RICE, TO VISIT THE

TOURIST BEACHES TO FEAST ON SEAFOOD AND FRESH VEGETABLES. AND IT'S APPARENT IN THE CIGAR FACTORY, WHERE AGELESS WOMEN AND MEN SIT ALONE BEFORE MOUNDS OF TOBACCO, NOT SPEAKING A WORD AS THEY ROLL COHIBA AFTER COHIBA INTO THE RED RINGS OF PAPER THAT ANNOUNCE CUBA'S MOST FAMOUS EXPORT. IT LOOKS REMARKABLY LIKE THE MAQUILADORAS OF MEXICO, OR THE T-SHIRT FACTORIES ALONG KNIGHT STREET WITH THEIR LINES OF CHINESE WOMEN LABOURERS.

FIDEL SPEAKS ON THE RADIO FOR THREE HOURS ONE NIGHT, RAILING AGAINST THE COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARIES AMONG US WHO STAY HOME FROM WORK, HORDE DOLLARS SENT BY RELATIVES IN MIAMI, PESTER TOURISTS TO BUY TRINKETS OR SEX. AT THE CANADIAN EMBASSY THE NEXT DAY WE EAT HAMBURGERS WHILE THE AMBASSADOR SPEAKS OF THE MULTIMILLION DOLLAR JOINT VENTURES, NEW AREAS OF SHORELINE THAT WILL BE FENCED IN AND DEVELOPED FOR EXCLUSIVE USE OF CANADIAN TOUR OPERATORS, AND (FINALLY!) A GROWING RECOGNITION BY THE LOCAL LEADERSHIP THAT YOU CAN'T RUN AN ECONOMY WITHOUT A WORK ETHIC, AND YOU DON'T GET A WORK ETHIC BY BUILDING A STATE DEDICATED TO HAND-OUTS.

ATHENE IS MORE FORGIVING THAN I. SHE CAME HERE EXPECTING TO SEE DRUDGERY IN EVERY FACE AND POLICE AT EVERY INTERSECTION, EXPECTING TO REINFORCE HER ANARCHIST CONVICTION THAT THIS SOVIET SATELLITE WAS HELD TOGETHER ONLY BY FORCE OF ARMS. WE HAVE A DRINK THAT NIGHT AND COMMENT ON CUBA'S CURIOUS ABILITY TO MAKE ANARCHISTS OUT OF SOCIALISTS, SOCIALISTS OUT OF ANARCHISTS.

ATHENE RETURNS HOME TO GET ACTIVE IN VANCOUVER'S CUBA SOLIDARITY NETWORK. I
START ON A MASTERS PROGRAM THE NEXT SUMMER, LOOKING INTO WHAT GOT THE
CANADIAN EMBASSY SO EXCITED AND HOW WE MIGHT RECONCILE THE SOCIAL GAINS,
DISTRIBUTIVE EQUITY AND GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CUBA'S SOCIALISM WITH THE
WORLD MARKET, THE CRACKDOWN ON 'ANTI-ECONOMIC BEHAVIOURS', AND A STRANGE
APPEAL TO 'SOCIALIST MORALITY' TO JUSTIFY WHAT APPEAR TO BE CLASSIC NEOLIBERAL
POLICIES.

A great ship is about to sail on a beautiful early morning. Assembled on the ship are all of the self-proclaimed "Marxist" ideologists who, now that the revolution has come, prepare to sail around the world to spread the good word, and build a society which will accept their vision of socialism based upon the joy of endless voluntary work and self-sacrifice. The ship has been named the Pequod in honor of its inevitable destination and in memory of the contributions of Melville and CLR James.

Suddenly, a huge crowd gathers. It is a mass of Gorz' "atomized, serialized proletarians" come to see the ship leave without any gratitude to the would-be-saviours on board. These workers, standing there on the pier on the first day of victory and liberation, knowing their true class interests, recognize their real "benefactors" for who they are. Laughingly, the crowd promises the ideologists on board the ship, Gorz among them, that everyone will put in as much voluntary work to build socialism as they possibly can. Reassured, the ship sails off and the working class waves bye-bye to the ideologists.

A few people light up joints and crack open beers. A few more go back to bed. A few go start a picnic. A few people carry on some needed services like health care (and even they only work short shifts). Everyone takes it pretty easy and begins spending their spare time thinking up how to build safe machines that can do the work people still do, and inventing new drugs, sex positions and crossword puzzles made up of the names of famous Marxist ideologists.

Midnight Notes Collective, "The Working Class Waves Goodbye"
in Midnight Notes, 1984, pp. 12-16

Chapter 3

Generally Socialism, Critically State Capitalism

It bears repeating that Marx' project was initially mapped out to cover far greater territory than he managed to write; in particular, the long-planned book on wage-labour – intended to provide as detailed a discussion of the political formation of the working class and its project as *Capital* did for that side of the tension (Negri, 1991; Lebowitz, 1992) – never appeared, with the result that Marx' seminal work, so far as his followers would see, was written with an emphasis upon and from the perspective of capital. However, fun though it might be to indulge in 'what-ifs' imagining my own vision of the 'true' Marxist theory of the working class, it is more critical to focus on what the left has done with that which it inherited – that is, despite the poverty of Marx' writings on the ins and outs of revolution-making, how did the idea of the working class and its historic mission develop over a century of working class organization?

If Marx left a starting point for the tackling of capital, it was this – something called the working class has been called into being as a productive force, and a political one. That working class, as the foundation of the productive process and having no resources to its name other than its labour-power and political will, is uniquely situated to transcend the relation capital and usher in a new order based from within the shell of capital. It is a messianic calling to uproot the social order and forego, once and for all, the forced labour hidden behind the wage, and to build in its stead not an economy nor a polity but a world, human

and collective. Only the working class can do it. The problem is, which working class or portion thereof – for as we have seen there has been no consensus on this critical issue - is to lead the charge. Marx tells us to look for the vanguard. But just who is that, and how are we to know them when they come riding into town? Hmmm – if membership in (and exclusion from) the working class was problem one, this, perhaps, is problem two.

Fortunately for workers everywhere, there was a solution. Or, more accurately, there were multiple solutions, two of which – the Communist Party and the trade union - gained substantial currency and had quite a go at success over the course of the twentieth century. This chapter and the next will consider these two organizational strategies and the political ideals they sought. The first, and the one which never strayed from claiming a direct line of succession from Marx himself, was the Communist Party model, an organizational form which grew out of the 1st International Workingman's (sic) Association co-founded by Marx and anarchist grand-pappy Mikhail Bakunin.

The Vanguard:

In 1848, Marx and his long-term collaborator Friedrich Engels produced a short document laying out in broad strokes the theoretical and analytical principals they would develop over the next four decades. The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was designed to frame the general mandate of a specific organization that would operate not in place of but both beside and among more general working class action (Marx and Engels, 1983: 116-117). But while seeming thus to

imagine a Party that was something less formal and more decentralized than was typical, they also defined this organization as a forum for "the most advanced and resolute section of the working class" (Ibid. 120), thus introducing the notion of the *vanguard*.

To be sure, vanguardism did not begin with Marx and Engels. Indeed the concept is already quite developed in French revolutionary Louis Auguste Blanqui's imagining of a "small well-organized group ready to strike at the proper moment and to carry the mass of the proletariat with it" (Mason, 1930: 25). But whispers of this in the idea of the Communist Party almost immediately spurred debate – initially between Marx and Bakunin who (despite his own tendencies to Blanquism at times) feared the development of the Party into a "chief engineer of world revolution, ruling and controlling the insurrectionary activity of the masses" (Bakunin, 1973: 240). Marx and Engels responded with disdain for fears of authoritarianism, arguing that revolution was, by its nature, an authoritarian act, and any other conception mere idealism (Engels, 1981: 198).

It was with Lenin, however, that Marxist vanguardism would truly come into its own, as the Russian activist sought to develop a theory of the Party which would lay out what was concretely necessary to seize state power and begin the building of socialism. Picking up on two relatively minor statements in the Marx-Engels canon – one defining a lower phase of socialism marked by the political dictatorship of the working class (Marx, 1977: 26), the other anticipating a higher phase in which even the workers' state dies out (Engels, 1977: 147) – Lenin posed the Party in more expressly political terms, and with a curious analytic

juggling by which it was conceptually indistinguishable from the working class as a whole (Lenin, 1977: 308) and yet, practically, "a centralized, militant organization" capable of steering the revolutionary process to its defined goal not only beyond but *against* the protests of real workers (Lenin, 1983: 134; McLellan, 1989: 91). Vanguard, Party, and socialist statehood as a transitional phase within the revolution – these together would form the basis of a political theory which, wedded to Marx' class theory, would take theoretical shape as the juggernaut "Marxism-Leninism", and spawn a Party-State model for the working class which would prove immensely successful in the conquest of power, if not in the critical stuff of revolution.

Socialist Statehood and the Transition:

The Russian Revolution of 1917 brought a self-avowed Marxist regime to power for the first time, placing the role of state construction at the centre of discussions about the transition to socialism. The Russian Revolution represents a profoundly important moment in working class history, a moment in which working class struggle not only toppled the existing state apparatus, but claimed state power as its own. At the same time, however, Bolshevism's success in conquering the state generated a fundamental change in much Marxist theory. In developing a theory of socialist statehood, the Soviet leadership inserted into Marxism its very antithesis: a theory of how to exert social control, how to manage workers, how to accumulate - in short, how to exploit²⁴. Hence the legacy of Bolshevism is not

²⁴ The Soviet theory of statehood here refers to the combination of two distinct yet related theories, Leninism and Stalinism. Leninism focused upon the roles of Party and state and their

only one of working class struggle and success, but also of the contradiction between Marxism as a theory of struggle *against* alienated work and imposed order, and Leninism (and later Stalinism) as a blueprint *for* such imposition in the name of socialism²⁵.

For Marx, the state and capital were inextricably linked, and thus any movement toward communism required the destruction of command at the state level as well as in the workplace. This is not to say that state-form is *irrelevant* to workers, but that by its very nature as regulator of social antagonism - including capital-worker relations - the state cannot be used to move beyond a logic of management and order, a logic which is intimately bound up with the reproduction of capital as command over labour. Transcending capital, then, requires transcending the state as an institution for the imposition of work and the quest for accumulation (Lebowitz, 1995: 204-6). In Marx' words,

...the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto..., namely, labour. Thus they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, the individuals...have given themselves collective expression, that is, the State. In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State (Marx, in Marx and Engels, 1978, p.200).

Lenin, however, was preoccupied with the defense of Bolshevik state power in the face of counter-revolution, and hence he developed a very different theory of

relationship to workers, institutionalizing a command structure, and re-creating the centrality of alienated work. Stalinism introduced the notion of 'socialism in one country', and further extended the idea of socialism as a system of capital accumulation. See Dobb (1948) and Mészáros (1995).

²⁵ Perhaps the best example of this is Lenin's adoption of the scientific management techniques of Frederick Winslow Taylor - techniques explicitly designed to separate production from knowledge, and to make workers function as pieces of the productive machine at large (. A post-Revolution Lenin announced, "Now that the workers, and no longer the bourgeoisie, hold power, we cannot reject Taylorism wholesale." (cited in Prychitko, 1991, p.39).

the state, which he deemed a repressive agent only "if it is a bourgeois republic, if it retains private ownership...and if private capital keeps the whole of society in wage-slavery" (Lenin, 1977, vol.3: 214).

Perhaps even more critical, however, was the doctrine of *socialism in one country*, adopted by Stalin; indeed, Mészáros argues – exaggerating only a little – that this central tenet of Stalinist theory is largely responsible for "the distortion of every major theoretical tenet of the originally envisaged socialist transformation" (Mészáros, 1995: 635). The doctrine made socialism a national project, ignoring the impact of Soviet participation in the relations of the world market and shifting the focus of attack from *capital*, as social relation, to *capitalism*, as the formal structures and institutions of liberal society. As Stalin himself wrote, "We must also discard certain other concepts taken from Marx' *Capital* - where Marx was concerned with an analysis of *capitalism*...I am referring to such concepts, among others, as 'necessary' and 'surplus' labour, 'necessary' and 'surplus' product, 'necessary' and 'surplus' time" (Stalin, quoted in Mészáros, 1995: 640). Arguing that the categories of class analysis could not be applied in the Soviet Union, where workers and managers were 'comrades and friends' (Ibid.: 641), Stalinist doctrine shifted the target of socialist transformation. No longer was official Marxism-Leninism to concern itself with the transcendence of capital as a relation of command permeating social relationships; now its purpose was no more than the abolition of *capitalism* and its specific mechanisms: private property, market-driven growth, and the buying and selling of free labour-power.

As the doctrine of socialism in one country drove a wedge between Marxian theory and the practice of state socialism, complementary developments took place in socialist economics. Of particular importance was Preobrazhensky's work on 'socialist accumulation'. Contrary to Marx, Preobrazhensky argued that socialism was a state project, and that a critical prerequisite to its development was the massive accumulation of capital in the hands of the state. Such accumulation, in turn, required an increased extraction of surplus value from both the large public sector and from small-scale private producers (Dobb, 1948: 184). Thus the 'fundamental law of socialist accumulation' demanded that state sector wages be lowered in proportion to production, and that the exploitation of small producers be increased in order to extract ever more surplus value from workers and peasants. It was a 'law' reminiscent of mainstream capitalist economics; and as it informed state policy toward workers' demands, the practice of socialism came to differ little from the logic of capitalist accumulation. As Stalin himself said, "If we were to raise the wages of labour unduly, no accumulation of profits would be possible" (Stalin, quoted in Dobb, 1948: 189). Accumulation was to take a front-seat to subsistence.

The Soviet project of state construction had profound significance for much Marxian theory, including Trotskyism and other variants critical of Stalin. Bolshevik economic policy, even before Stalin, was rooted in a central plan designed to enhance accumulation, and which sought to manage workers and resources in the most economically efficient manner, i.e. to produce the greatest

profit. This was socialism within capital, socialism not opposed to accumulation, but *better at it* than capitalism had been (Mészáros, 1995: 46-7)²⁶. Indeed, the main pillars of the socialist economy - command/ the plan, incorporation of labour into the state, and socialist accumulation - were all designed to improve upon, rather than transcend, capital.

State Socialism as Capital:

The analysis which characterizes state socialism as a system rooted in capital is by no means new; there exists a long analytical tradition which, by subjecting self-styled socialist regimes to Marxian analysis, has discovered profound similarities between the logic and purpose of actually-existing socialism and actually-existing capitalism. Rooted in the work of such people as Rosa Luxemburg (particularly her work on the general strike [1925] and her critique of Bolshevism [1940]), the Council Communists of the 1930s rejected Leninism's central focus on the conquest of state power as fundamentally incompatible with the profoundly *anti-state* logic of communism. For Councilists such as Anton Pannekoek, Marxism was not a passive description of the scientific unfolding of history, but rather the theoretical expression of the real movement of the working class (Pannekoek, 2002 [1936]). It was autonomous action by working people, using decidedly new organizations and methods of struggle, which constituted the activity of moving beyond capital. The state, the Party, the trade union: each

²⁶ In Mészáros' words, "capital's historically successful mode of surplus-labour extraction - because it works and so long as it works - can also set itself up as the *absolute measure* of 'economic efficiency' (which many people who considered themselves socialists would not dare to challenge, promising therefore *more* of what the adversary could deliver as the legitimacy ground of their own position...)" (Mészáros, 1995: 46-7).

of these was a form of management developed within capital, and each retained an adherence to the principle of systematic social control. Thus none could be expected to transcend alienated work and the domination of capital; this would require something altogether different – something more spontaneous, more anarchic, more local, and entirely at odds with Lenin's democratic centralism²⁷.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the project of the Council Communists was carried on by C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya - known in this area of their work as the Johnson-Forest tendency. Their analysis focused upon the Soviet model of accumulation, and upon anti-worker legislation and pro-capital policy-making as these manifested themselves under socialism. Dunayevskaya and James broke with Trotsky over, among other things, their respective analyses of Soviet Russia, which Trotsky characterized as a deformed workers' state (Trotsky, 1973 [1937]) but a workers' state nonetheless, and his adherence to the notion of 'working class' as urban, industrial and – by extension – predominantly white and male (James, 1973: 63). In 1950, James published *The Class Struggle*, which focused on Trotskyism's failure to draw links between the structure of Soviet socialism and the wider dynamics of world capitalism. James argued that socialism's attempts to incorporate class struggle at the level of the state was *not* a characteristic unique to socialism, but could be seen elsewhere in the world capitalist economy as Keynesianism rose to prominence. For James,

²⁷ Pannekoek and his comrades took as their model the workers' councils which arose throughout Italy as workplace forums for workers' political education, strategizing, and organizing, often independent of any formal trade union or party structure. A major influence on generations of anti-capitalists, including Gramsci (McLellan, 1989: 177), the idea of the self-governing workers' council continues to inspire. In the late 1990s, a new councilist movement sprung up across the U.S.; generally known as 'workers' circles', these local and independent networks emerged to make sense of the impact of trade liberalization on workers, and grew into a major source of anti-globalization activism by the time of the Seattle anti-WTO protests in 1999.

building on Engels, the fundamental distinction between actually-existing socialism and capitalism was that centralization in the former was more extreme. In his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels had identified the planned economy as a logical development of capital; from private enterprise (individualized capitalism), through the joint-stock company and the trust (partially-socialized capitalism) to a more sophisticated socialized capital – capital, still, but in a sophisticated social form²⁸, only to potentially become post-capital with the end of imposed and alienated labour, and the abolition of the state (Engels, 1977: 146-7). James, then, expanded: both Keynesian capitalism and socialism relied upon state-managed economic development; both saw the state enter the class struggle directly; both sought to make workers identify their own interests with the goal of increased production; both sought the growth and expansion of state power and state direction. Thus, while the Soviet model carried each of these structures further, it and Keynesian capitalism were better understood as variants on a theme of socialized capital, sharing a common relational content and essential logic²⁹ (James et al, 1972: 17-25).

While James was developing his theory of state capitalism in the 1940s, his collaborator Raya Dunayevskaya was carrying out an empirical analysis of the Soviet model in order to reveal how capital accumulation remained the

²⁸ “...the social character of the productive forces forced upon the capitalists themselves. Taking over the great institutions for production and communication first by joint-stock companies, later on by trusts, then by the state. The bourgeoisie is demonstrated to be a superfluous class. All its social functions are now performed by salaried employees” (Engels, 1977: 151).

²⁹ Prychitko makes a similar case, arguing Marx’ critique recognized economics and politics as a unified whole, whereas Lenin et al sought to eliminate economic exploitation while maintaining political power in the form of the state; the result, he suggests, is a socialism in which “the hierarchy of knowledge and total rule of factory boss is universalized, not destroyed” (1991, p. 26)

fundamental logic of the socialist state³⁰. In a series of articles (later entitled *The Original Historical Analysis: Russia as state capitalist society*), Dunayevskaya showed how production continually outstripped consumption in Soviet society, and traced the way the state imposed austerity during periods of reduced productivity in order to maintain an acceptable level of surplus-labour extraction. Through quantitative studies such as these, Dunayevskaya showed that the major characteristics of modern capital - surplus value, money, interest, etc. - remained central to the Soviet model; Labour, exploitation, accumulation and class struggle - in a word, capital - remained the foundation of the system.

The analysis of state socialism as a form of capital has more recently been undertaken by István Mészáros in his massive work, *Beyond Capital*. Here the author explores the over-riding logical similarities between capitalism and actually-existing socialism³¹ - both a part of what he terms 'the capital system'. For Mészáros, state socialism treats capitalism as a series of specific institutions and mechanisms to be 'abolished', and socialism as a state-led project for economic growth. Marx, on the other hand, focused his critique upon *capital* in general, not merely the formal structures of *capitalism*, and his conception of

³⁰Aside from Dunayevskaya and others' critiques, official Soviet discourse is itself quite explicit about the primacy of accumulation over subsistence. To offer only one example, Stalin's "Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R." argues, in circular fashion, that if primacy were placed upon subsistence needs, "the effect would be to destroy the possibility of the continuous expansion of the national economy, because the national economy cannot be continuously expanded without giving primacy to the production of means of production." Cited in Mészáros, 1995: 643.

³¹ In his exploration of the continued rule of capital in state socialism, Mészáros does *not*, however, imply that both models of accumulation are capitalist. Rather, he argues that capital both pre-dates and post-dates capitalism. There are important differences, then, in the structural organization of capital under socialism and capitalism, particularly as regards the mechanism for the extraction of surplus value, which is carried out primarily through the market under capitalism, and through the state, i.e. political command, under socialism. See Mészáros, 1995: 630-1.

socialism demanded the transcendence of capital as an organic whole: as capital, as labour, and as state (Mészáros, 1995: 618 and 790).

If state socialism abolished only capitalist structures, without addressing the fundamental relationships of command and accumulation that constitute capital, then it is not surprising that the state's response to a crisis of socialist accumulation would lead to a re-emergence of market capitalism³². The two forms of domination share common assumptions, logics and dynamics, and hence the shift from one form and one ideological justification to the other does not require so giant a leap as many had assumed³³. Both strategies treat individual workers as fragmented consumers, and the working class collectively as merely 'labour power'; both emphasize the requirements of accumulation at the expense of subsistence; both rely upon the exploitation of alienated labour in a work process thoroughly invested with a logic whose bottom line is 'profitability' (Mészáros, 1995: 643-5 and 649-50). State-led transitions, then, - from market capitalism to state socialism and back again to the market - are limited largely to

³² For analyses of capital's restructuring in China and Vietnam, see the following:

Doriane, Olivier, 1994. "China: a major confrontation is brewing" in *The Organizer* (originally published in French in *La Verité*

Greenfield, Gerard, 1994. "The Development of Capitalism in Vietnam" in Miliband and Panitch (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1994: between globalism and nationalism*.

Weil, R., 2006. "Conditions of the Working Classes in China" in *Monthly Review*, vol. 58, no. 2

³³ Mészáros notes that many capitalist policy-makers are baffled by the fact that socialism's fall did not resolve the crisis of capital. But to have expected it would, he argues, is to fail to recognize the nature of the crisis. That is, the crises of socialism and of capitalism did not arise from the fact of their competition, but rather from a deeper dynamic in which both were embedded - the crisis of *capital*. Thus if capitalists today are puzzled by the continuing lack of growth, this is only because they have failed to recognize socialism's collapse as a symptom of capital's overall crisis. And they failed to recognize, too, that the Soviet system was not diametrically opposed to their own, but "only the obverse side of the coin" (Mészáros, 1995: 38).

the realm of management strategy and of form - or *personification*, in Mészáros' words - of capital (Mészáros, 1995: 616).

The critique of actually-existing socialism is central to any analysis of contemporary anti-capitalism, not in order to disregard nor to denigrate the contributions of the traditional left, but to come to grips with the fact that orthodox conceptions of socialism retained at their base many of the assumptions and dynamics of capital. By confining its critique of capital to the issue of capitalism as private property, the free market for labour-power, and unequal distribution, traditional socialism left untouched the substance of capital as social relation: imposed and alienated work. When crisis came, then, in the late 1980s, it was not surprising that socialist 'reform' tended to embrace capital and its logic; the very definition of what socialism entailed was, from the beginning, plagued with this dynamic.

WOBBLIES AND FARMWORKERS, 1990-1992

IN 1990 I GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL AND MOVE TO VICTORIA TO STUDY CREATIVE WRITING. MOSTLY I WANDER USED BOOK STORES, ATTEND SILENT RETREATS WITH RADICAL CATHOLICS, AND READ ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING I CAN ON THE I.W.W.

THE WOBBLIES – THAT NETWORK OF COMMUNISTS, ANARCHISTS AND ENTIRELY UN-“IST” WORKING PEOPLE THAT BECAME, WITHIN A FEW SHORT YEARS OF ITS 1905 FOUNDING, IDENTIFIED AS THE SINGLE GREATEST INTERNAL THREAT TO U.S. CAPITALISM. THE WOBBLIES – THOSE SINGERS, POETS, ORGANIZERS, BRAWLERS WHO WANDERED FROM STRIKE TO STRIKE, FROM TOWN TO TOWN, PRODUCING AN INCREDIBLE WEALTH OF MUSIC, UPRISING, ART, SOLIDARITY, HOPE. THE WOBBLIES – THOSE WOMEN AND MEN, IRISH, ITALIAN, SWEDISH, JEWISH, POLISH, MEXICAN, BLACK AND INDIAN - EXILED, JAILED, SHOT, BEATEN, HUNG.

I LEARN ALL THE SONGS. AND I SING THEM.

I RACE INTO MY FRIEND CHRIS' APARTMENT, WAVING A WET *INDUSTRIAL WORKER* NEWSPAPER. THE I.W.W. IS GROWING AGAIN, AND A CHAPTER IS ACTIVE IN VANCOUVER.

TWO WEEKS LATER, I RECEIVE MY RED CARD. TWO MONTHS LATER, I AM IN SAN FRANCISCO'S MISSION DISTRICT FOR THE I.W.W. ANNUAL CONVENTION, SITTING ACROSS FROM JUDI BARI, A FEMINIST/ ANARCHIST/ ENVIRONMENTALIST WHO IS:

- RECOVERING FROM A BOMBING – LIKELY BY THE F.B.I
- SUING THE F.B.I. -- AND ULTIMATELY WINNING

- MOUNTING A LEGAL DEFENSE AGAINST CHARGES BY THE F.B.I. -- FOR
CARRYING THE EXPLOSIVES THAT MAIMED HER

WHEN JUDI DIES A FEW SHORT YEARS LATER I WILL CRY. TODAY I JUST SING.

THE I.W.W. IS FRUSTRATING, OFTEN PETTY AND SECTARIAN LIKE ANY ORGANIZATION. BUT
AMAZING, TOO, TO BE A UNION MOVEMENT GROWING IN STRENGTH, WINNING STRIKES,
WHILE ALL ABOUT US THE HOUSE OF LABOUR IS FALLING DOWN. IN THE MID 1980S, SOME
300 PEOPLE COUNTED THEMSELVES WOBBLIES -- MOSTLY SINGERS, ARTISTS,
ANARCHIST ACADEMICS, AND A FEW OLD-TIMERS. BY THE MID 1990S, WHILE
EVERYWHERE UNION DENSITY WAS FALLING RAPIDLY, THE I.W.W. NUMBERED IN THE
THOUSANDS, WITH JOB SHOPS IN EVERY CANADIAN PROVINCE AND ALMOST EVERY U.S.
STATE: WINNING STRIKES AGAINST MAJOR CHAIN STORES LIKE BORDERS BOOKS AND
STARBUCKS; REPRESENTING BIKE COURIERS, SEX WORKERS, RETAIL SALESPEOPLE,
PRINTERS, STUDENTS, THE UNEMPLOYED; EARNING RECOGNITION BY AFL-CIO-CLC
LABOUR COUNCILS AND FEDERATIONS IN SEVERAL PLACES.

MY SCHOOL YEAR ENDS, AND I SPEND THE SUMMER READING LABOUR HISTORY,
EXAMINING THE DIFFERENT THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS AND POLITICAL AGENDAS OF
CRAFT UNIONS AND INDUSTRIAL UNIONS, LABOUR AS MANAGER OF WORK AND LABOUR AS
CREATIVE POLITICAL POWER OF WORKERS. I AM SURE I UNDERSTAND. I HOP A PLANE FOR
LOS ANGELES, AND GO TO WORK FOR THE UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AN AFL-
CIO UNION, BUT ONE WHICH STILL HAS A REPUTATION FOR COMMUNITY ACTIVISM,
INTEGRATION OF STRUGGLES AT WORK AND STRUGGLES IN DAILY LIFE, DIRECT ACTION.
CESAR CHAVEZ IS A LABOUR HERO SECOND TO NONE.

I GO TO WORK ORGANIZING PROTESTS, COORDINATING THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN FOR THE UFW'S GRAPE BOYCOTT, AND SETTING UP A NEW OFFICE DONATED BY THE LOCAL UNITED WAY. I COME ACROSS A FOLDER MARKED "ANTI-UFW DOCUMENTS", AND READ. I AM STRUCK BY HOW MANY ARE CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON UNION STRATEGY AND TACTICS, WRITTEN BY THE LABOUR LEFT. TWO MONTHS LATER, A UFW SHOP IN A CANNING FACTORY VOTES TO DECERTIFY AND JOIN INSTEAD A NEW FARM-LABOUR UNION ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIALIST AND ANTI-RACIST ACTIVISTS. CESAR IS LIVID. ANOTHER TWO MONTHS AND A STAFFPERSON COMPLAINS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT BY AN ELECTED OFFICER; HER SUDDEN DEPARTURE IS EXPLAINED AS THE RESULT OF "POLITICAL DIFFERENCES". ON BEHALF OF STAFF, I MEET WITH THE SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT — MORALE IS DOWN, QUESTIONS NEED ANSWERING. THE REPLY IS QUICK: "IF YOU'RE HAVING TROUBLE TRUSTING THE LEADERSHIP OF THE UNION, PERHAPS YOU CAN SUPPORT US BETTER FROM CANADA." IT'S MY LAST WEEK IN LOS ANGELES. THREE OTHER STAFF MEMBERS LEAVE THE NEXT MONTH.

Organized labor, with support from the Bush administration, is trying to build more unions in Iraq and help those already there to function free of government and employer control. The U.S. government...has allocated about \$15 million to form employer groups and unions in Iraq... Organized labor has had a historical role in "postwar activities in every war since World War II" with backing from the U.S. government, Sweeney said.

"Republican administrations tend to see trade unions as part of a civil society that is dedicated to democracy and building democracy abroad," said Harry Kamberis, executive director of the AFL-CIO's American Center for International Labor Solidarity. "They see it as important to U.S. strategic interests."

Associated Press, March 2004

The continuity of struggle is easy: the workers need only themselves and the boss in front of them. But the continuity of organization is a rare and complex thing: as soon as it becomes institutionalized it becomes used by capitalism ...

Mario Tronti, *Lenin in England*

http://www.geocities.com/cordobakaf/tronti_england.html

We cannot get away from organization. These employees will organize, in one way or another. The real solution is, not to try to destroy the organizations... but to give them official recognition, to give them a part in the administration...

John R. Commons, *Labor and Administration*, p. 69

[T]he system of legally established contract-oriented unionism and adversarial collective bargaining...may well be in terminal crisis...[T]he long debate over the meaning of industrial democracy still appears to have a certain appeal, but now less in terms of its promise to transcend the inequities of America capitalism than in its promise to make U.S. firms again competitive and dynamic leaders in a world market.

Lichenstein and Harris, *Industrial Democracy in America*, p. 3

Chapter 4

Organizing for Defeat³⁴

If socialist statehood via conquest of power by the Communist Party was the explicitly vanguardist approach to Marx' call to arms, a similar if more subtle claim to class leadership took shape from within the process of production itself. Not strictly incompatible with a party strategy – for Communist Parties had their allied unions just as trade unions have generally sought some more overtly political affiliation – the trade union movement as it will be discussed in this paper derives its mandate and authority from a similar claim to be *the* voice of workers. That is, whereas in CP approaches the Party trumped the unions as the ultimate 'go-to-guy', in the context of North American, Western European and allied countries around the world this side of the Iron Curtain, social democratic and labour parties by and large sought and won a less class-specific and more policy-driven constituency; in these cases, it was the mainstream trade union movement which won recognition as the representative of working class interest and in that spirit took up the idea of the vanguard.

The union. Rooted in the factory, at the point of production, its weapon the withdrawal of labour-power from the boss rather than confrontation with the state (at least in theory...such lines are never cleanly drawn...), the history of the trade union is nonetheless the history of a particular political order, a particular strategy for the organization of social relations in cultural, political and economic spheres. With multiple origins ranging from medieval guilds which protected skilled trades,

³⁴ A version of this chapter is forthcoming from *Labour/ Le Travail*.

socialist cells which propagandized class theory in the factories of nineteenth century Western Europe and racist campaigns of certain groups of North American workers to shield themselves from wage-competition from newer immigrants and former slaves, the modern trade union had by mid-twentieth century established itself as a partner in political-economic governance and spoke with some authority as the single voice of the patriotic, productive working class. But as quickly as it came, that partnership went, its status with the chiefs of industry under full assault by the mid 1970s, its political seat pulled from under it in 1981, with Ronald Reagan's firing of striking air traffic controllers and Margaret Thatcher's all-out war on Britain's National Union of Mineworkers. The following pages will explore this trajectory of class organization as it appeared in the North American context.

The decline and retreat of the North American labour movement in the past two decades has been a matter of extensive commentary and scholarly and political debate (Babson, 1999; Krahn and Lowe, 1998; Ross and Jenson, 1986; Swartz, 1993). And while these discussions have contributed immensely to our understanding of economic restructuring and strategic imperatives for the labour movement's continued political viability, much of the literature is limited to either a 'counting of the dead', as it were, or a focus exclusively on the aggressive strategy of capital in the post-Keynesian era. Surprisingly little has been said about unions themselves, and the relationship between their organizational consolidation as partners of a once-ascendant Keynesian class compromise and their subsequent paralysis in the face of collapse of that compromise. That is:

how did the historical development of the trade union form render it particularly vulnerable to the ravages of capitalist restructuring? By tracing the broad contours of trade union history³⁵, we can analyze the strategic and organizational crisis of the official labour movement from a different perspective; not as a victory of capital over the working class, nor as a widespread abandonment of economic struggles, but rather as a result of *expanded* struggle by an *expanded* global working class, and the movement of anti-systemic conflicts *beyond* the plane for which the trade union organization was prepared. Rather than a crisis of struggle and a victory of capital, then, the challenge to mainstream labour (and traditional left political parties) can be understood, at least in part, as a crisis *within* the left, a crisis brought on by the extension of popular demands beyond Keynesian limits, beyond the organizational capacity of the trade union, and beyond the parameters of settlement embraced by traditional left organizations.

The Birth and Expansion of the Trade Union:

In North America, the birth of the modern trade union is generally traced to approximately 1880, as the *industrial* enterprise came rapidly to replace the farm and the family-based shop as the heart of economic production (Babson, 1999; Braverman, 1974; Heron, 1989; Palmer, 1983; Rinehart, 1996). Implying greater physical and cultural distance between employers and employees, technological displacement, de-skilling and larger work-groups, industrial capitalism required

³⁵ The historical sketch in this paper is intended to present only the most broad trends and general tendencies in North American labour. For more complete histories, see re: the U.S. Boyer and Morais (1988), Foner (1972) or Zinn (1980), or re: Canada Krahn and Lowe (1998) or Palmer (1983), to name only a few of the best-known.

new forms of organization and mobilization by which workers could effectively present grievances and win concessions in the workplace. The *trade union* emerged within this political-economic context, initially as an association of skilled, white, male workers to wage *defensive* struggles which sought to prevent the degradation of labour in industrial capitalism's 'satanic mills' (see, for example, Babson, 1999; Heron, 1989; Montgomery, 1987; Rinehart, 1996)³⁶. Building on traditions of artisanal guilds, these craft unions by and large articulated a demand for fair wages, respect for skill, and privileging of their members over the mass of 'unskilled', 'common' workers unleashed by the expansion of industrial production (Cutler and Aronowitz, 1998: 10-11). In short, they were constituted by, represented, and defended what has been commonly referred to as an aristocracy of labour, and sought not to overturn the rule of capital so much as to win and/or protect a privileged place within it³⁷.

It was only with the advent of World War I, however, that this emerging labour movement won its first major victories, taking advantage of the international crisis and the demand for increased productivity to wrest concessions from capital and state. Governments in both the U.S. and Canada responded to labour's challenge with a dual strategy of accommodation and

³⁶ Even many neoconservatives acknowledge the profoundly stabilizing influence of craft-oriented unions. Troy, for example, - a proponent of Milton Friedman's unfettered capitalism - rails against the emerging "social movement unionism" while recognizing and lamenting "Old Unionism's acceptance of capitalism and rejection of socialism" (1994: 119).

³⁷ Consider, for example, a satirical verse written in response to the hostility of many skilled machinists to the proposed inclusion of 'less-skilled' boilermakers in their union. "Aristocrats of labor/ we are up on airs and graces./ We wear clean collars, cuffs and shirts,/ likewise we wash our faces./ There's no one quite so good as we/ in all the ranks of labor./ The boilermaker we despise/ although he is our neighbor. (Cited in Montgomery: 197)

repression, the former reserved for craft unions which sought an increased share in the profits generated by capitalism, the latter pursued relentlessly against a rapidly expanding *industrial unionism*, which (archtypically) sought to organize all sectors of the working class and whose struggles were often explicitly aimed towards the overthrow of capitalism (Buhle, 2005; Heron, 1989; Leier, 1990; Palmer, 1983).

This industrial union movement, represented initially and incompletely by the Knights of Labour, and most notably by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the One Big Union (OBU), was to play a key role in the future evolution of labour organization, impacting the development of unions many years after its disappearance from the scene. Characterized by the diversity of its membership, its emphasis on organizing unskilled mass labour, direct action tactics, and class-struggle discourse, the ideal-typical industrial unionism stood in dramatic contrast to its craft-oriented counterpart (see Lynd, 1996 ; Buhle, 2005). Perhaps even more significantly, industrial unions attempted to break, if only partially and gradually, with the limited notion of 'working class' which had defined craft unions as exclusively the organizational terrain of white urban male workers (Montgomery, 1987: 200-1). Often articulating an organizational vision which included industrial workers, agricultural labourers, and the unemployed, and which rejected the racial and gender segregation typical of their more 'respectable' counterparts, unions such as the IWW envisioned a 'working class' far more broad and diverse than that typically emphasized by the mainstream

industrial and political left³⁸. As their successes grew in the years leading up to World War I, and particularly after the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, industrial unions represented a significant threat, if not to the legitimacy of the state, at least to the ability of capital to generate a stable rate of accumulation and maintain popular legitimacy, and to the trade union as *the* organizational model for class struggle and *the* vehicle for worker representation. This movement, then (along with the more generalized socialist-foment in the WW I and Bolshevik Revolutionary years), can be largely credited for forcing a strategy which was to emerge initially after World War I and be entrenched in law after World War II - accommodation of the state and capital with craft unionism in order to address the most glaring inequities of capitalism, politically marginalize the "radical element" within labour, and designate anti-capitalist labour movements as "Bolsheviks", thereby justifying their fierce and often bloody suppression³⁹.

The industrial relations regime which emerged in the inter-war period, then, had two related antecedents: the existence of a craft-based, defense-oriented and politically-cautious trade unionism with a long history of defending skilled, white, male workers, and the violent repression of alternative forms of organizing rooted in anti-capitalism, mass action and cross-sectoral working class mobilization. That is, it was largely the mass action and anti-capitalism

³⁸ For more on industrial and mass-action unionisms, see Lynd, 1996; Leier, 1990; or Foner, 1972, vol. 4.

³⁹ See Buhle, 1999 and 2005; Foner, 1972, vol. 4, Leier, 1990 and 1995; McCartin, 1993; or Zinn, 1980 for more detailed information on the legal consolidation of trade unions and the repression of alternative organizational forms.

(whether socialist, anarchist or syndicalist) represented by industrial unions that opened political doors for craft-based organizations to gain official legal recognition, and the frequent cooperation of the latter in repression of the 'Bolsheviks' and 'anarchists' which consolidated the legal standing of AFL-affiliates as the 'legitimate' voice of labour and as a partner in the tripartism which emerged in the post-WW II years (Buhle, 1999 and 2005; Fletcher, 2005; Foner, 1972; Leier, 1995). As capital enjoyed its post-World War I heyday on the heels of the war-years' accommodation with craft unions, then, the stage was set for a drastic reorganization of capitalist governance; not only were profits skyrocketing amidst the post-war reconstruction, but the protections enjoyed by craft unions during the war years and their cooperation in the identification, vilification and repression of 'the reds' had established a major political precedent, and could not be undone without provoking extensive resistance from even the most moderate of labour organizations.

Depression, War and the Keynesian Reconstruction:

The years after World War I saw an attempt by capital to withdraw its recognition of the trade union movement at precisely the moment it enjoyed windfall profits associated with post-war reconstruction (Babson, 1999: 42-3; Palmer, 1983: 189-90). But as there is no need to delve into the details of those years here, suffice it to say that the combination of rapid and often reckless capitalist expansion and massive resistance by both unionized and non-unionized workers to the imposition of austerity and the removal of legal protections led, by 1929, to the

collapse of the North American economy: as Ford understood well, mass production without a corresponding accommodation of worker demand (i.e. overproduction combined with under-consumption) had rendered capitalism visibly-vulnerable to mass protest. With the onset of the Depression, then, a new strategy was called for: one which could re-ignite economic growth, stabilize the accumulation of capital, ensure the creation of a consumer market (i.e. increase wages), and weaken the attractiveness of alternatives to capitalism. That strategy emerged in the *General Theory* of John Maynard Keynes⁴⁰, and was to fundamentally reconfigure capitalism for several decades and to institutionalize in North America a particular form of working class association, with specific goals, specific strategies, and a specific organizational form – what we now understand as *the* trade union.

⁴⁰ For a review of Keynes from the political right, see Troy, 1994, pp. 126-127.

The Keynesian strategy⁴¹ involved the expansion of state regulation, legal recognition of unions, and implementation of protective legislation to prevent a recurrence of the social collapse of the Depression years. Explicitly accounting for and attempting to address the inequalities produced by capitalist development, the need to maintain balance between rates of production and consumption, and the reality of working class mobilization, Keynesian strategy aimed to direct class antagonism through legal channels and incorporate wage demands into capital's own growth strategy, thereby institutionalizing and *managing* what had previously been a challenge to capital itself.

The compromise involved three groups – collective capital, the state, and the unionized industrial working class whose mobilization in the inter-war years had threatened to destabilize the system. Trade unions were recognized as legitimate representatives of working class interest, and were ensured a strictly circumscribed place in political and economic governance in return for

⁴¹ The term "Keynesian strategy" as used here is short-hand for a package of reforms involving state policy, economic planning, welfare and industrial relations, which came to influence government (and to a lesser extent corporate) policy between the late 1930s and the late 1940s, and which maintained its currency until the 1968-1973 period. "Keynesianism" is attributed to Keynes in that he, more than any other, identified the crisis of capital, and suggested that the recognition and incorporation of working class demands could be more economically and politically lucrative than ongoing struggle, crisis and reform. It must be recognized, of course, that Keynes himself neither anticipated nor planned all the various components which came to be associated with his more general theory. The "Keynesian" industrial relations package in North America, for example, emerged from the works of others (who both preceded and followed him), including Sumner Shlichter (*The American Economy* [1948]) and John R. Commons (*Institutional Economics* [1934]), as well as the mediation practices and arbitral decisions of William Leiserson and George W. Taylor.

I do not suggest, then, that Keynes himself is solely responsible for, nor even directly involved in all things "Keynesian" as that term is used here. I do believe, however, that his *General Theory* represents the most sophisticated and complete encapsulation of the capital-side class analysis which informed the restructuring of the world economic system around Bretton Woods, and which guided economists, planners, and policy-makers in a sizable part of the world through the mid twentieth century. For those reasons, the short-hand term Keynesianism is both politically- and historically-meaningful.

commitments to pursue their interests through legally-recognized and legally-managed channels and to cooperate in the anti-Communist campaigns of the Cold War. Without recounting the specific history of labour's 'rationalization' and political integration into tripartism (a history whose struggles, gaps, and silences have been well-documented elsewhere⁴²), the result of this arrangement was an organizational form whose democracy was modeled on the liberal state, which participated in maintaining industrial stability so long as collective agreements were honoured by employers, and which won monetary compensation generally pegged to productivity and profit increases. They were junior partners in governance, to be sure, but partners nonetheless, whose own success was to be measured by the success of overall capitalist development.

But the Keynesian strategy included another component as well, one directed toward the provision of basic needs and the prevention of abject poverty; this *social wage* was comprised of an ensemble of welfare policies which ensured relief for unemployed workers, a guaranteed level of subsistence, and provision of basic health care and education, among other things. Managed by the state and distributed as universal entitlements, these provisions went farther than the productivity deal in terms of their interference with classical economic logic, in that they provided for subsistence separated from the requirement to work and limitation of intra-class competition for jobs. What is more, the social wage extended far beyond the unionized, industrial sector, and contributed to the

⁴² See, for example, Leier, 1995; Lichentstein and Harris (eds.), 1993; Moody, 1988 and 1997; Ross and Jensen, 1986.

development of a widespread system of social benefits which was *not* conditional upon capitalist growth as was the productivity deal.

Keynsianism's combination of an entitlement system which separated work from subsistence and which was applied across the population with the explicit incorporation of unions into industrial development and the pegging of wage increases to productivity thus had contradictory implications. Particularly relevant for the labour movement, however, was the fact that its involvement was limited to that side of the deal which *did* link productivity to wages, and thus produced a situation in which the state alone managed distribution according to need while the official representatives of the working class managed distribution according to productivity, and tied themselves to the collective capitalist rather than the collective social body. The long-term implications of this for labour have been studied extensively (Buhle, 1999; Moody, 1988 and 1997; Ross and Jensen, 1986; Swartz, 1993) but one particularly insightful interpretation is that articulated by C.L.R. James, for whom Keynesianism institutionalized a system of capitalist/ trade union *co-management*.

For James, the Keynesian system re-composed the official union movement as a "bodyguard of capital" (James, Forest and Stone, 1972: 21), effectively assigning to it a managerial role in the production process. The industrial relations regime consolidated the formal collective agreement, with its legalized procedure for settling disputes, as the single-most important tool of the union and thus formalized the union's commitment to limit job action and to oversee the maintenance of production according to the terms of that agreement.

(see Leier, 1995). Important as a legally-binding document protecting workers' collective rights, then, the collective agreement, and the entire industrial relations system which evolved from it, also brought labour, industry and the state together in a tripartite partnership to manage the conditions of capital accumulation - to determine the parameters within which labour could be exploited, to standardize compensation, and to ensure that capital could expand without unnecessary disruption.

Finally, the introduction of Keynesian strategy impacted the union's *internal* structure, formally dividing the trade union as legal-political entity from its membership. Though not reducible to an over-simplified 'bureaucratization', this formalization of the union organization armed its executive members with specific knowledge and disciplinary powers (Leier, 1995: 36-40) while at the same time disarming workers of the very direct action and workplace-based strategies which had forced capital's recognition of the union in the first place.

But the shift from workplace mobilization to legal resolution of disputes had implications beyond the disempowerment of rank and file members and the renunciation of creative strategies for immediate and direct worker action. Not least of these was the growth of a professional servicing staff whose expertise was not in the area of *struggle* but *negotiation* and *law*. The professionalization of unions emerged as a natural consequence of the industrial relations regime which governed Keynesian-era capitalism, and certainly served the immediate interests of labour in that context. The processes of negotiation, mediation, and arbitration by which labour peace was maintained required that all parties bring to

the table a common language, common skills, and a common political culture, all of which it was deemed necessitated the retention of labour relations specialists by unions no less than by management. These union staffers brought with them extensive knowledge of the legal system, political strategies often gained through involvement with electoral politics, and a detailed knowledge of procedure and process to operate large organizations with efficiency. What they rarely brought, however, was an understanding of immediate industrial dynamics, an intimacy with the workers they represented, or an ability to shift from boardroom to workplace strategies. As a result, labour found itself tied to a legal process for dispute resolution which was effective so long as the tripartite arrangement remained respected by all parties, but could neither anticipate the unravelling of that compromise nor cope with the suddenly and dramatically more-antagonistic environment that emerged after the mid-1970s.

Crisis of Keynesianism, Crisis of Labour:

The gains won by trade unions under Keynesianism are traced directly to the crisis of capital in the inter-war years and the ability of working class organizations to leverage that crisis; with the institutionalization of the Keynesian system, however, a dramatic change had taken place. The official organizations of the working class had tied their success to capital's, with the result that a crisis of capitalism would now also manifest itself as a crisis within the labour movement itself. When the Keynesian system broke down in the early 1970s,

then, so too did the very *raison d'être* of the formal union movement, ushering in a period of crisis from which organized labour has yet to recover.

The crisis of the Keynesian order has been discussed at length (Cleaver, 1993; Huntington, 1975; Lichenstein and Harris, 1993; O'Connor, 1973; Phillips, 1985). There are, however, factors which both contributed to and emerged from that system's collapse which are of particular relevance in considering the ongoing crisis of labour. First, it must be acknowledged that Keynesianism as a system to manage capitalism emerged out of capital's compromise with only one particular sector of the global working class: industrial, unionized, located in the global north, and generally white and male (Huws, 2006b: 25). At the same time, however, the implementation of Keynesianism as state policy involved the provision of extensive entitlements to a wide array of workers, unionized or not. Nor was that social wage limited to populations in North America and Europe; throughout what is called the Third World, national governments instituted their own variants of Keynesianism, together most notably referred to as *import substitution industrialization*, which privileged organized industrial labour relative to agricultural and subsistence workers, and which established, too, entitlements which extended at least to urban dwellers. There was, then, precedent for working class sectors *excluded* from the productivity deal, and *without* formally-recognized organizational structures, to mobilize for inclusion in and/ or increases to the social wage without being tied to institutional arrangements such as the productivity deal or legally-governed dispute resolution mechanisms.

The political implications of this situation, as it emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, has been analyzed extensively,⁴³ and will be discussed further in later chapters. What is significant at this point is that the crisis and collapse of Keynesianism was rooted largely in the rebellion of sectors of the global working class who had been *excluded* from the institutional arrangements of tripartism, but who had been able to take advantage of the social wage – though just how this was configured varied widely across the globe. Women demanded recognition of domestic labour as *work*, campaigned for wage equity and equal opportunity in paid employment, and sought community over isolation; Third World workers exploded in rebellion from Vietnam to Angola to Iran to Guatemala; civil rights and Black nationalist movements surged, particularly in the US; students refused a life-path limited to school->career->death in favour of the multiplication of desire; ecological movements mushroomed in response to agribusiness, environmental degradation, and the nuclear threat; agricultural labourers formed unions inspired by both organized labour and emerging social movements; general strikes in Czechoslovakia, Paris, Mexico and more drew together students, feminists, industrial workers, migrants, and the unemployed. Diverse and often-fractured though they were, these struggles shared in common a post-Keynesian sensibility, in that they all emerged from a popular re-evaluation of the social value invested in productive activity (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 273) and a new social valorization of such 'intangibles' as leisure, desire,

⁴³ See Chapter 5 for discussion of Latin America and how the crisis took political shape in those areas in which an overwhelming majority had been excluded from the productivity deal and in which naked force was more directly employed.

freedom⁴⁴. Waves of conflict circulated globally, inspiring and drawing on one another, in what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call a “convergence and accumulation of struggles” (2000: 264) for which the Keynesian order was entirely unprepared. As the rate of profit dropped, and individual firms sought concessions from their unionized employees, the latter steadfastly refused to accept smaller wage increases than they had achieved during the boom years, with the result that strike levels peaked in the early 1970s (Caffentzis, 1998).

That the political situation was untenable for capital is beyond question: by 1973 Richard Nixon’s administration was actively working to enact the Family Assistance Program; a massive step beyond traditional welfare, the legislation was to establish a guaranteed national wage as a fundamental right of all citizens (ibid.). Not only did wages not fall, then, in line with profits; demand reached new heights. As Nixon floundered, capital’s collective wisdom fell behind a new strategy to restore its ability to generate profit. That strategy, generally referred to on the Left as *neoliberalism*, emerged in theory in the early 1970s and was implemented as policy through the 1980s (Navarro, 2006), ushering in a drastic reduction in wages, deep cuts to universal entitlements, and intense political repression of popular movements which resisted austerity.

This, then, was the situation facing the North American trade union movement in the years after 1973: its organizational structure had been designed to fit a tripartite model of negotiation and ‘fairness’; its sources of strength in periods of crisis, worker mobilization and direct action, had been to a great extent

⁴⁴ For more on the “new social movements” of this era, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Joppke (1987), and Plotke (1990).

suppressed in the repression of industrial unionism (a repression in which the trade unions actively participated), and largely abandoned by both executive members and servicing staff; its ultimate recourse was to a framework which based remuneration on the rate of profit (now frequently the rate of *loss*); and it had disavowed solidarity with workers in the Third World and with huge numbers of potential allies at home in order to win favour with the Cold Warriors of North American political administration (Buhle, 1999; Greenfield, 1994; Huws, 2006a). In short, it had established itself to respond to a political-economic strategy governed by Keynesian principles, and was entirely incapable of responding when capital abandoned that strategy for another, far more aggressive.

THE HISTORIES

CAPITAL AND CLASS AT SFU, 1994

CONRAD COMES TO SFU IN SEPTEMBER 1994, FRESH FROM HIS PH.D. PROGRAM AT AUSTIN, TEXAS. WE CHAT BRIEFLY AT THE DEPARTMENT'S WELCOME PARTY FOR NEW GRADUATE STUDENTS – ABOUT MARIATEGUI AND THE PROJECT OF AN INDIGENOUS MARXISM. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO EXPECT FROM GRADUATE SCHOOL, NOR EXACTLY WHAT I'M DOING HERE ASIDE FROM SOME VAGUE IDEA ABOUT CUBA AND ISOLATION IN THE POST-COLD-WAR AMERICAS, AS FROM CHILE TO GUATEMALA THE LEFT DISARMS ITSELF OF UTOPIAS TO JOIN THE GREAT MARCH WE'RE CALLING "DEMOCRATIZATION".

CONRAD WILL BE TEACHING A NEW COURSE, "THE POLITICAL-ECONOMY OF POLICY REFORM". THE TITLE IS BAD ENOUGH; THE READING LIST IS MADE UP EXCLUSIVELY OF BROOKINGS PAPERS, I.M.F. POLICY BRIEFS, AND ASSORTED ARTICLES ON HOW TO MANAGE ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING. THE CLASS REVOLTS. MIRIAM IS A GUATEMALAN EXILE FROM THE LEFT-WING OF THAT COUNTRY'S ARMED REVOLUTIONARY OPPOSITION, THE U.R.N.G. CINDY IS JUST BACK FROM COLOMBIA FROM WHERE, FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, WE'VE RECEIVED HER LETTERS OF EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLINGS OF TRADE UNIONISTS, INDIGENOUS LEADERS, WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS. BOTH SPEAK THE MOOD OF THE CLASS, ASTOUNDED THAT ANYONE WOULD WALK INTO THIS DEPARTMENT, WITH THESE STUDENTS, AND ASK US TO STUDY THE HOW-TOS OF MARKET REFORM AND THE 'COMMON-SENSE' ECONOMICS OF INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

CONRAD PUTS UP A GRAPH. IT CHARTS, OVER SOME TWENTY YEARS, MAJOR CHANGES IN LATIN AMERICAN ECONOMIC POLICY AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE. ANOTHER

GRAPH SHOWS WAVES OF STRIKE ACTION AND POLITICAL PROTEST IN LATIN AMERICA. THE TRAJECTORIES ARE VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL. CONRAD WALKS US THROUGH THE DATA, GETTING DOWN TO A MONTH BY MONTH ANALYSIS. CYCLES OF STRUGGLE ACROSS THE CONTINENT PRECEDE POLICY REFORM IN EACH CASE. "CAPITAL", HE CONCLUDES, "IS REACTIVE. THIS COURSE READS POLICY CHANGE. BUT THE SUBSTANCE IN THESE READINGS IS MORE MARXIST IN METHOD THAN ANYTHING YOU'LL FIND IN A LEFT WING JOURNAL, BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE STUDY CLASS, THESE PEOPLE STUDY STRUGGLE, IN TERMS OF WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING IN THE WORLD, AND ITS IMPACT ON CAPITAL. THESE READINGS CONSTITUTE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT AND SOPHISTICATED OF CAPITAL'S STRATEGY BRIEFINGS."

NO ONE IN THE CLASS IS CONVINCED.

For while from a technocratic viewpoint a gradual cut in expenditures may be desirable, the government may find that gradualism allows time for those hurt by the cuts to combine and exert irresistible pressure for their reversal...

Deepak Lal, *The Political Economy of Trade Liberalization*, pp. 160-161

For a transition to political democracy to be viable...results cannot be too accurate or representative of the actual distribution of voter preferences. Put in a nutshell, parties of the Right-Centre and Right must be 'helped' to do well.

Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter,
Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies, p. 62

The vitality of democracy in the 1960s raised questions about the governability of democracy in the 1970s...

The vigor of democracy in the United States in the 1960s thus contributed to a democratic distemper, involving the expansion of governmental activity, on the one hand, and the reduction of governmental authority, on the other...

Needed, instead, is a greater degree of moderation in democracy.

Samuel Huntington, *The Crisis of Democracy: the United States*, pp. 64-113

The political difficulties on the path to more efficient domestic policies should not be minimized...A courageous, ruthless and perhaps undemocratic government is required...

Deepak Lal, *The Poverty of 'Development Economics'*, p. 33

Chapter 5

Class Struggle Buries the Working Class?

keynes on crisis to crisis of keynesianism

If enclosure, conquest and colonization define the processes by which this thing called capital came to be imbued with state power, by which accumulation and growth became the defining-characteristics of civilization, and by which labour was made into a resource to be bought and sold, then it was only late in the nineteenth century that something resembling capitalism could be said to be entrenched on a global scale. By 1900 virtually the entire globe had been brought under some sort of state governance, the rule of currency was sufficiently widespread to make commerce a global reality, and the selling of labour-power on an open market was an accepted reality across the globe – so accepted, in fact, that wage-labour was by this time embraced as a welcome alternative to its alternatives, indentured labour and slavery.

But by 1900, too, the first stirrings had been felt of a global resistance. Already by 1789, with almost simultaneous French and Haitian revolutions that explicitly referenced one another, the first links had been made between an urban working class in Europe and a largely agricultural and largely-slave-based resistance movement thousands of miles away (see Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000). At the opening of the 20th century the colonies were beginning to fall away, first in Latin America, and then globally, their independence movements

drawing significantly on ideological frameworks and organizational forms that had direct parallels in Europe and North America – trade unions and socialist parties.

In the face of this mounting resistance, the first decades of the twentieth century witness a profound cracking of the global order – from the trenches of World War I, in which Europe's greatest squabbled over the diminishing returns of a fully-colonized globe now showing signs of rebellion to the Bolshevik Revolution and from the terror of socialism as reality to the post-war boom, the presumption of endless accumulation and the shock of the stock market crash. But most profoundly, both for the continued expansion of capital and for the directions to be taken by the left, was the intense debate over capitalist strategy which raged – most notably but by no means exclusively between the UK's John Maynard Keynes and Austria's Friedrich Hayek, free-marketeer *par excellence* of the Austrian School of Economics⁴⁵, defender of traditional liberalism, and patron saint of the neoliberal assault to come decades later. Keynes practical approach, to moderate the gross inequalities of capitalism with state planning and concessions to workers, faced off against Hayek's fierce anticommunism, strict adherence to laissez-faire, and political caution in *The Road to Serfdom* of the slippery slope from even minor regulation of the economy to utter totalitarianism (Hayek, 1976 [1944]). It was a debate which would result, ultimately, in successive rounds won by each side and divide the twentieth century into political-economic epochs, each defined by the conventional wisdom of capital at

⁴⁵ See, for example, Carl Menger, *Principles of Economics* (1871), Ludwig von Mises, *Interventionism* (1940), and Eugen von Bohm-Bawerk, *Capital and Interest* (three volumes, 1884-1921).

the time and the development, in each, of a coordinated and global capitalist strategy.

Capital Reads Marx - class, struggle and crises of accumulation:

What is now referred to in shorthand as 'the Bretton Woods order' - or, in even shorter-hand, "Keynesianism" - was initially and quite explicitly designed to stabilize capital by a) recognizing the working class as subject and as the basis for capitalist production, and b) restructuring capitalism in order to incorporate the working class and defuse its revolutionary potential (Negri, 1994: 23-51; Phillips, 1985: 4-5; Teeple, 2000: 16-19). That is, the Keynesian state and world order were explicitly designed to answer the increasing organization and mobilization of workers. Faced, following the Great War, with rising levels of unionization, larger and more frequent strikes and job action, the expansion of socialist parties, and the political alternative presented by the Soviet Union⁴⁶, economist John Maynard Keynes' strategy aimed to defuse working class agitation and stabilize the wage by incorporating workers into capital's analysis of its own existence and into the structures of capital as institution, i.e. the union, the state, and multilateral institutions. As Negri notes, Bretton Woods was a capitalist policy-reading of Marx (Negri, 1994: 27); it sought to solve the problem of class struggle by *incorporating* workers' organizations and demands in order to formalize and

⁴⁶ For some, including C.L.R. James (1992), the alternative presented by the Soviet Union was critical to the rise of Keynesianism, not only as threat, but as example. Many of the defining features of the Bretton Woods order - state planning, state recognition of workers' organizations, implementation of needs-based social and economic entitlements - were borrowed directly from socialist policy, and facilitated Bretton Woods becoming a global order which cut across borders otherwise marked 'capitalist' and 'socialist'. The differences, in other words, were of degree rather than kind, as the fundamental principles of economic management were more alike than different.

manage them. If class struggle was the motor force of history, and workers had achieved a level of organization which threatened to halt growth, then capital would need to recognize and accommodate this change within its own strategy.

The broad contours of Keynesian strategy have been discussed, and there is no need to delve much further into the details; the purpose, rather, is to address the crisis of that order and the political construction of yet another stage of accumulation. It is important to note, however, that Keynesian incorporation was achieved differently in the so-called First and Third Worlds. In the former, managed capitalism took shape in the welfare state and the productivity deal, by which capital offered periodic wage increases and union recognition in return for the cooperation of the officially-recognized labour movement in the drive for profits (Phillips, 1985: 4-5). By contrast, the Third World, and Latin America in particular, saw Keynesian economic planning form around a dual strategy of import substitution economics – involving the use of high tariffs on imports to subsidize domestic industrial development – and corporatist, often populist, politics which formally linked unions and key ‘community’ organizations to the state (Bruton, 1989; Prebisch, 1950; Collier, 1994). In both, however, economic planning was central, overall policy and strategy were globally coordinated, and formal mechanisms for state-capital-union partnership were implemented, incorporating urban industrial workers and the public sector through the political parties and unions which claimed to represent them. And in both, too, just who was excluded was to have enormous implications some decades later, as the basic premise of Bretton Woods – that planning could balance adequate growth

for capital with sufficient redistributive mechanisms to offset rebellion – found itself tested to the breaking point (Huws, 2006a).

A Class Beyond Partnership:

The collapse of capital's Bretton Woods-based strategy can be traced to the late 1960s and 1970s, a time of expanded popular struggle throughout the world. Unprecedented strike levels across North America, the U.S. civil rights mobilizations and rise of the feminist movement; student uprisings in Mexico, France, and the U.S.; workers' rebellions in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and throughout the Soviet bloc; insurrections in Latin America, Africa, and Asia - all of these exploded in full force in the late 1960s and extended themselves through the 1970s as autonomous movements of working people in opposition to various institutions of capital's social order (Cleaver, 1989: 21; Caffentzis, 1998).

As discussed, the Keynesian project was explicitly developed to stabilize capital by a) recognizing the working class as an active political subject and labour as the basis of capitalist production, and b) restructuring capital's governing bodies in order to incorporate workers' organizations and defuse their revolutionary and anti-systemic potential (Phillips, 1985: 4-5; Hardt and Negri, 1994: 23-51). Faced with ever-rising levels of unionization, larger and more frequent strikes and job action, and the alternative state-form represented by the Soviet Union, Keynes' strategy aimed to direct class struggle through legal channels and incorporate wage demands into capital's own growth strategy, thereby formalizing and institutionalizing what would otherwise be (and

previously had been) a challenge to capital itself. But if the Keynesian state was constructed as a politics of class inclusion, how can its crisis be explained by class-based struggle? The answer lies primarily in the limits of that inclusion, and the mechanism by which compromise was purchased - the *social wage*.

The productivity deal which characterized the welfare state was brokered between two groups - capital, organized through multilateral institutions and states which sought to ensure profitability, and the formally-organized working class in the core regions of the global system (Teeple, 2000: 151). It was this sector whose mobilization in the inter-war years had threatened to destabilize the system from within its core. But more important to the collapse of the Keynesian order was that massive population of *excluded* workers, those whose labour was of fundamental importance to capitalist development but whose struggles the trade union movement disregarded or openly opposed as competitive. Women, whether labouring in the service sector or the home; migrant labourers and workers of colour in North America and western Europe, who were excluded from most trade unions; children, whose labour was (and frequently remains) unrecognized; agricultural labourers and the peasantry throughout the Third World - all of these, by far the majority of the world's working class, were excluded from a productivity deal which established a limited social peace between capital and organized labour.

The second component of the Keynesian order which is essential to understanding new social movements and the shifting composition of class struggle is the *social wage*, that ensemble of welfare policies which ensured relief

for temporarily unemployed workers, a guaranteed basic level of subsistence, and some system of health care and education provision, among other things. Organized and distributed as universal entitlements, these social policies interfered with the fundamental organizing principle of capitalism through the provision of subsistence without work and the limitation of intra-class competition for jobs. Provided as part of the pact which bought the cooperation of organized labour, the social wage extended far beyond unionized workers, and contributed to a widespread system of benefits which was not conditional upon capitalist growth as was the productivity deal.

As already mentioned, 1968 represents the beginning of the end for Keynesianism and the watershed year of new social movements' emergence⁴⁷ - year of student uprisings, the rise of a mass women's movement, the rapid spread of anti-Vietnam War protests, the success of the U.S. civil rights movement in forcing a concerted state effort to end segregation, insurrections across the Third World, revolts against command socialism in Poland and Czechoslovakia. It has been marked by poststructuralists (Foucault, 1983, cited in Plotke, 1990; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) as the year in which new social movements, or identity struggles, exploded into public view, forever altering the dynamics of social antagonism. But 1968 is also claimed by many class analysts as the resurgence of a mass working class struggle which was to lead, some five years later, to the definitive collapse of Keynesianism and capital's ability to

⁴⁷ The term 'New Social Movements' is a fluid one, whose definition varies across the literature. Generally, however, new social movement theorists have noted the following characteristics which they say distinguish the struggles which emerged in this era from those before: issue-specific, concerned primarily with identity and/ or individualization, lifestyle- or value-oriented; decentralized or diffuse; concerned with overcoming the public/ private dichotomy. For more information see Offe, 1985; Kauffman, 1990; Johnston et al, 1994; Buechler, 2000).

contain class struggle within its own institutions (Elbaum, 2002; Cleaver, 2000; Phillips, 1985; Joppke, 1981; O'Connor, 1973). Such a widespread reference to 1968 clearly marks it as a critical year for social struggles generally. But does it represent a break with the class politics of previous eras, and the emergence of something altogether new? Or is that moment in history better understood as a continuation of previous struggles, and their shift to a new terrain? Actually, it is both, and in this we can see both the failure of orthodox Marxism-Leninism to grasp the relational nature of class, and the continuing relevance of class as a key component of the 'new' and 'emergent' struggles.

Christian Joppke has analyzed the post-1968 collapse of Keynesianism as a response to the struggles of the day, struggles which were both new in their composition and goals, and which also carried at their core a rejection of capital's social order and the promise of something different (1981). Building on O'Connor's 'fiscal crisis of the state' thesis (1973), Joppke notes that the universal entitlement characteristic of many welfarist policies diverted significant dollars from private capital to the public, and made the social wage independent of productivity or free market logic (Joppke, 1987: 240-1). As popular demands (many of them associated with the rise of civil rights, post-colonial, feminist and student movements) rose, and as sectors of excluded workers demanded inclusion in the compromise, the abilities of capital and the state to maintain the deal were stretched to the breaking point; a significantly larger and more complex working class now in rebellion, the inclusionary practices of capitalist welfarism

could not expand without jeopardizing continued capital accumulation (O'Connor, 1973: 5-10).

For Joppke, like O'Connor on the left and Huntington on the right, the Keynesian strategy was not feasible if capital was required to incorporate the full complement of the working class; this much at least was clear from the ensuing debt crisis, which emerged across First, Second and Third Worlds. Government deficits mushroomed as the Keynesian state responded to the crisis in the fashion for which it had been formed - with public spending (Cleaver, 1989: 21; Huntington, 1973: 75). And yet this response only exacerbated the fundamental conflict, between an expanded global working class and a civil society steeped in universal entitlements or "collective consumption", on the one hand, and a corporate sector unable to maintain profitability and a state in financial crisis, on the other (Elbaum, 2002: 27-40; Joppke, 1987: 245-6; O'Connor, 1973: 5-10). The balance upset, government deficits mushroomed through the early 1970s, as the Bretton Woods planning state responded to the rebellion in the fashion to which it was accustomed - with still more public spending (Cleaver, 1989: 21; Huntington, 1973: 75). As debt soared and public demands only increased⁴⁸, socialized capitalism could no longer provide a stable regime for accumulation; the only option was to reduce the social wage - austerity.

Cue Hayek, whose intellectual legacy has been carefully watched over at the University of Chicago since 1947. Public spending and crisis management - the hallmarks of the strategy Keynes had championed - now incapable of

⁴⁸ For more on the origins and development of the debt crisis, see Cleaver, 1989; Cline, 1983.

sustaining adequate levels of growth for capital's liking, the laissez-faire strategists of the Chicago School go on the offensive. Their basic premise: socialized capitalism could no longer ensure capitalist growth; a new consensus had to be developed, a new strategy in the class war. In 1973, it was apparent that the only option was austerity⁴⁹.

Austerity - economic objectives and political dilemmas:

Rooted firmly in Hayek, but formulated now as economic policy by Milton Friedman and political strategy by the likes of George Gilder and Sam Huntington, capital's new strategy, *neoliberalism*, began to be developed as theory in the early 1970s, and was in place as general policy by the early 1980s. A profoundly anti-statist economic plan, neoliberalism combined financial liberalization, trade liberalization and privatization in order to restore a pre-Keynesian and patently *laissez-faire* approach to capital accumulation. In one crucial respect, however, the neoliberals took a page from Keynes' notebook – Hayek's inheritors rooted their own strategy explicitly in a class framework, taking the capitalist reading of Marx a step further, beyond attempts to incorporate working class demands to all-out class warfare. Witness two of the all-time neoliberal greats: Anne Krueger and Deepak Lal.

⁴⁹ 1973 marks the year in which the U.S. abandoned the gold standard, and thus broke with one of the fundamental organizing principles of the Keynesian era, and the year of Salvador Allende's overthrow in Chile. The Pinochet regime which took power in Chile is generally regarded as the first overtly-neoliberal state project, counting among its advisors Milton Friedman and other high-priests of neoclassical reform (Grandin, 2006).

*Capital to the Barricades – Krueger and Lal on the politics of economics*⁵⁰:

Anne O. Krueger's⁵¹ *Whither the World Bank and the IMF?* (1997) reviews the historical evolution of two major international financial institutions (IFIs), evaluates their work over the past fifty years, and offers recommendations to definitively re-make the Keynesian financial institutions along classical liberal lines.

Initially established as lending institutions and international coordinating bodies to facilitate reconstruction after World War Two, the IMF and the World Bank faced increasing criticism during the late 1960s and early 1970s for allowing policy-makers to determine whether debt-payments were to be financed by tax-increases or spending cuts (Krueger, 1997: 14); characterized in shorthand as a "lack of transparency", this concern essentially revolved around the political pressures upon governments, pressures associated with the demands of interest groups such as trade unions. Having borrowed funds from international institutions, governments faced a period of expanded popular protest and militancy in these years, and were forced by their populations to use the borrowed funds for demand-satisfaction – i.e. workers' needs - rather than investment in profit-oriented enterprises. But demand-satisfaction only raised

⁵⁰ Portions of this section have been previously published in "The Politics of Economic Restructuring" co-authored with Laura Huey and appearing in *Critical Sociology*, vol. 31, no. 4 (2005).

⁵¹ Anne O. Krueger is Professor of Economics and Ritch Professor of Humanities and Sciences at Stanford University, Senior Fellow of the Hoover Institution, director of the Center for Research on Economic Development and Policy-Reform, and former vice-President of Economics and Research at the World Bank.

popular expectations even further, and so helped to establish cycles of renewed borrowing whose debt payments could only be financed either by further loans or by tariffs on imports and increased taxation of corporate and high-income populations. To express it in class terms without altering the intent of Krueger's text, the IMF and World Bank became sources by which national governments could increase social wages in their countries at the expense of local elites, international businesses, and IMF/ World Bank coffers. The situation worsened through the early 1970s, forcing global financial interests to begin a restructuring process to set international economic governance upon more explicitly capitalist lines. Enter neoliberal economic theory and a process of rapid and extensive policy reform.

Krueger then proceeds to discuss *conditionality*, the set of policy-reforms demanded by the IMF and World Bank during the course of restructuring, and designed to ensure that debt-service payments are maintained and loans used to maximize efficiency, i.e. for investment rather than demand-satisfaction. While the components of the reform package are many, its central purpose is recognition that the balance of payments is adversely affected by "state-owned enterprises, pricing quotas, actions to provide a social safety net" (ibid: 19) - all areas associated with re-distribution of wealth or the social wage. So, once again, the class content of Krueger's analysis is clear: wages have been raised above acceptable levels; the creditors demand immediate repayment, not in currency, but in something far more substantial and long-lasting - in the political balance of power, and a forced reduction of overall social wages.

That, in a nutshell, is Krueger's review of how the IMF and World Bank have evolved into the institutions they are today; and that evolution has been critical to the very survival of a growth-oriented global economy. But the task is not complete, and so Krueger turns to the question of further reform, not of debtor countries, but of the IMF and World Bank themselves, in order to ensure that their political capacity to enforce demand-restriction and market-oriented harmonization continues to be enhanced.

Krueger makes a number of proposals for reform of the IMF and World Bank, but two are particularly important if we are to understand her political project. First, she notes that the economic functions of governments can be gathered under two major projects: efficiency-enhancement and redistribution. The former encompasses responsible, internationally aware, long-term goals and strategies, whereas the latter includes those politically expedient policies by which states attempt to shore up their legitimacy, if not their popularity. That being said, the IMF and the World Bank, as institutions of *global* governance, accountable to the world economy rather than individual political groups, must base their own work exclusively upon the efficiency-enhancing set of policies, with no consideration of issues of redistribution (ibid: 22).

But that is only half the story. If international financial institutions (IFIs) are to successfully privilege efficiency over redistribution, measures must be taken to ensure compliance with IFI conditionality at the level of the state; and, as already noted, Krueger is concerned with the tendency of states to balk in the face of the political resistance which is a sure outcome of cuts to social wages and deferral

to external agencies for policy direction. So, since global harmonization of economic policy is dependent upon the political will of governments, a will that is highly unstable, what is required is reform of the IFIs themselves, and strengthening of their ability to impose sanctions upon states that fail to comply with their directives. In shorthand, what is required is greater ability of IFI's to *impose* economic policy, or, in Krueger's words, to "shift the political balance of a new equilibrium more rapidly, or influence the new political equilibrium in ways that improve the economic outcome" (Ibid: 32).

What we see, then, is that Krueger's two proposed reforms - one to privilege economic efficiency over human need, the other to prevent political mobilization from being successful - are not class-neutral by any means. Indeed, Krueger is so aware of class issues, and so aware that an economic agenda and a democratic agenda may lead in fundamentally different directions, that the whole point of her analysis is the need to keep wages low, to constrain governments from doing anything to raise them, and to remove economic decision-making from democracy's sphere of influence.

If Krueger's writings contain within them an acknowledgement of ongoing class antagonisms, Deepak Lal's⁵² work places those antagonisms front and centre. Unlike Krueger, for whom the political struggles engendered by capitalism are obstacles to a desired end (the free expansion of capital) but nonetheless secondary, Lal presents a call for reform that is overtly *political*. His "Political

⁵² Deepak Lal is James S. Coleman Professor of International Development Studies at UCLA, co-director of the Trade and Development Unit of London's Institute of Economic Affairs, and advisor to the World Bank, the OECD, and numerous other international financial institutions and government ministries.

Economy of Economic Liberalization" (1987: 158), published by the World Bank, articulates capital's response to 'weak' governments and to those who suggest neoliberal reform is perhaps having "disastrous effects" on the income and employment of working people. The essay makes clear, in no uncertain terms, the political implications of liberalization - that is, who will be the winners (capital) and losers (labour), and how the state is to remain guarantor of a satisfactory rate of capital accumulation when faced with extensive popular resistance.

Lal's paper appears to address formal politics, such as governments' political will to institute reform. But on a deeper level, class politics are the issue. The question he is concerned with is a government's *political ability* to institute reform, by which he means the ability to implement a sustainable and irreversible adjustment package in the face of mass resistance (Ibid: 160). The chief concern is that, as a government's power rests ultimately on its legitimacy and/ or governability (with or without recourse to violence), political entities rely on control of the popular will. There is no question, for Lal, that adjustment is contrary to the interests of working people, who have received social wages, or "entitlements", which "however justifiable on grounds of social welfare" create an 'uneconomic' atmosphere (Ibid: 167-70); but equally clear is that governments must institute reform as *law*, which requires "a willingness to overcome the resistance of those whose entitlements will be rescinded" (1987: 170). The question, then, is how a political entity ultimately concerned with legitimacy and/ or governability can successfully impose a program that so clearly contradicts popular interests and which therefore cannot be open to public debate?

Lal suggests two responses. First, given the degree of public influence on national governments, states cannot be trusted to impose unpopular reforms indefinitely; therefore, they must be *required* to follow adjustment programs, and this is to be accomplished by re-writing national laws to limit the power of government, and to submit economic control to extra-national, non-political (i.e. non-accountable, undemocratic) institutions (Ibid: 160)

The second point is a recognition that to apply welfare concerns to adjustment is to demand gradualism; and while this may be desirable as a means of 'easing the pain', it is completely unfeasible politically - unfeasible because "gradualism allows time for those hurt by the cuts to combine and exert irresistible pressure for their reversal" (Ibid: 160-1). In other words, once resistance is organized and begun, it may well be "irresistible". The only option, then, is to avoid it altogether; that is, to impose immediate and far-reaching adjustment in as short a time as possible, with as little discussion as possible. Governments can't be trusted; ultimate control must be passed on to the financial interests themselves. Cut quick, cut deep, regardless of human impact. Any sign of weakness or hesitation allows workers time to organize. This is Lal's message, and its class content hardly needs explaining.

Theory, Strategy, Policy – capital's neoliberal offensive:

Neoliberalism came to the world largely (though not exclusively) as a result of Structural Adjustment Programs, or SAPs⁵³ (Acuña and Smith, 1994: 28);

⁵³ The term 'structural adjustment program' was used primarily in reference to the Third World, and linked directly to debt-payment issues arising from the oil crisis/ petrodollars flood of the early

formulated by the International Monetary Fund in response to the crisis, the SAP menu provided a blueprint of neoliberal reform. Its policy demands were relatively consistent across borders, and so too were its political goals, as each component targeted wages in its own way. A brief review of the most common policies and their aims makes the point (ECEJ, 1990: 24; Arida and Taylor, 1989: 856-7; Kiguel and Liviatan, 1992: 36; Krueger, 1984: 25-6; Navarro, 2006; Polak, 1991: 33-40; Polak, 1977: 24-31).

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Official Aims</i>
1) Currency devaluation	increase exports, decrease imports; cut real wages
2) Raise interest rates	allocate investment to most efficient producers
3) Restrict money supply	control inflation; cut demand
4) Cut expenditures	reduce excessive demand
5) Lower tariffs and liberalize trade	increase imports, competitiveness
6) Privatization	make enterprises more efficient, erase market irregularities, cut wages
7) Promote export crops	maximize comparative advantage, earn foreign exchange

The policies of structural adjustment were designed to dismantle the financial controls and distributive policies which had underpinned the Keynesian productivity deal and create a free market conducive to capital accumulation (Polak, 1991: 16-7); but, as discussed earlier, neoliberalism also implied a restructuring of the state in order to prevent *politics* - meaningful democracy,

1970s. However, though the term SAP was not generally used in reference to North American and Western Europe, where 'deficit-reduction' was the preferred shorthand, SAP terms were in many respects near-universal. What is more, though implemented in the North largely by neoconservative governments, here, too, the IFI's did play a role in urging adoption of the SAP package, though less as forced conditions than threat of forced conditions should states not make the cuts themselves. The UK example, however, indicates that the IFI's were more than prepared to take disciplinary action against the North where necessary. In the 1960s international banking interests took action to devalue the pound sterling against the will of the Harold Wilson's Labour Government; the scene was repeated in 1976, when the International Monetary Fund forced the UK to implement structural reforms to facilitate free market expansion, paving the way for Margaret Thatcher's self-led austerity plan some few years later.

popular resistance - from muddying the waters of profit, even in the discourse of neoliberal theorists themselves (Lal, 1987: 275-6). In this, neoliberalism went further than its pre-Keynes model, rejecting the concept of political marketplace (i.e. democracy) which had been partnered with the economic market in classical theory (Lal, 1987: 285; Dornbusch, 1993: 95). This anti-political bias inherent in neoliberalism exacerbated a number of problems, most notably the classical dilemma of capitalism: an inherently unequal and conflict-ridden system such as capitalism requires *governability*, a mechanism to manage political behaviour so as to prevent the destabilization of the system (Nef, 1993: 128).

Governability can take one of two roads: *exclusion* of working people from participation ensures the continued political supremacy of capital, but lacks legitimacy and may inspire revolt; *inclusion*, on the other hand, may legitimize economic relations but facilitates demand for economic and social as well as civil rights. Hence the historic dilemma of capital: which strategy offers the greatest security for continued accumulation of profit? And hence, too, neoliberalism's particular challenge: if 'too much democracy' had spelled the death of the former world order, how could the political realm be restructured to allow for austerity's implementation without generating effective resistance?

Searching for Solutions - National Security:

The crisis of capital in the early 1970s spawned a search for a capitalist politics that could achieve sustained economic growth. Though specific political formations vary across times and geographies, a general sketch of the outline

translates fairly well across borders but can be seen particularly clearly in the Latin American experience given that: a) one of the first places to implement the package that came to be known as "neoliberalism" was Chile; b) Chile's model became, in turn, a common model for other regimes on the continent and worldwide within a few years; c) Latin America's experience, including the modeling of Chile and an associated continental coordination and integration of military regimes, is especially telling given that region's geographic, political, economic and military proximity to the United States.

There is no need to discuss at length the different political systems Latin America has experimented with through its history; only two main systems-types, the national-security regime and liberal democracy, are of direct importance here. With the failure of import substitution industrialization (ISI) and corporatism to adequately incorporate the demands of *all* sectors of the working class, the 1960s saw rising popular dissent across the continent. Traditional parties lost legitimacy, electoral systems were undermined, and U.S.-inspired aid programs were largely dismissed by popular organizations; as leftist guerrilla movements sprang up in virtually every country in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, the existing social order required political stabilization, and fast.

Capital's immediate strategy found a possibility in the Cold War; recognizing the crisis for what it was, a manifestation of class struggle, capital responded with counter-insurgency via the doctrine of National Security. Following the "too much democracy" analysis of Samuel Huntington (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, 1975), national security stressed the importance of

stability and the ability of the government to govern, full stop. National security as policy, then, was no accident; the regime-type it inspired, *bureaucratic authoritarianism* (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, 1989, vol.3: 3-6), defined fifteen out of twenty Latin American countries by 1976.⁵⁴ National security integrated the militaries of the Americas under a common purpose, and very often a common command (emanating from the United States); its role was to quell revolt and return stability, by whatever means necessary.

For Latin America, such means included:

- * Guatemala, 50,000 to 75,000 killed 1980-85; tens of thousands more "disappeared"
- * El Salvador, 80,000 killed in the 1980s
- * Nicaragua, 50,000 killed in the 1970s
- * Chile, 10,000 killed in a 3 month period after the 1973 coup
- * Peru, Argentina, and Uruguay, 20,000 to 60,000 killed in each between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s⁵⁵

Elsewhere the story was similar. In Iran, Mossadegh's challenge to British oil companies in 1951 led to full-scale nationalization of the industry and spurred a succession of assassinations, rebellions and interventions (including his own ouster in 1953) from which the region has never recovered. In Africa, the 1961 murder of Zaire's Patrice Lumumba - only the best-known of a series of murders of anti-colonial leaders across the continent; increased targeted and indiscriminate killings by South Africa's already bloody apartheid regime (for example, of school children in Soweto, 1976, of Steven Biko in prison, 1977); reconstitution, at the behest of the U.S., of factions of former anti-colonial

⁵⁴ The exceptions were Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Cuba.

⁵⁵ For more on state terror, see Menjívar and Rodríguez, (2005) and Corredi, Fagen and Garretón (1993).

movements as anti-communist 'freedom-fighters' throughout Africa, but most notably and most brutally in Mozambique (FRELIMO) and Angola (UNITA), where death tolls rose into the hundreds of thousands. In Asia, active strategic, political, military and financial support for Suharto in Indonesia, Marcos in the Philippines and whatever other butchers could help stem the tide of self-determination after the U.S.' own defeat in Viet Nam. And, of course, home was no exception – the formation of COINTELPRO to target militarily the American Indian Movement, Young Lords, Black Panthers, Students for a Democratic Society, Yippies, and whoever else got in the way.

But no matter how outrageous the brutality of the national security state, military command was insufficient; austerity was the end goal, state terror only a means to achieve that end. National security was a political response - the state partner of economic austerity⁵⁶ - designed to counter the tide of revolt and impose wage cuts by force. But the military regimes proved unable to quell dissent, as popular protest and guerrilla movements expanded; the brutality of national security succeeded only in alienating political moderates, professionals, and the continent's small middle-income population, leading them to alliance with the revolutionary left. Not only a crisis of legitimacy, but a crisis of governability was in the works. Biko once again – *'If you allow me to respond, I'm certainly going to respond. And you may have to kill me even if it's not your intention'* (Biko, 1978: 153). Naked violence, the last recourse to restore order, a

⁵⁶ Despite the fact that national security emerged earlier than the neoliberal program, it would be wrong to disassociate the two; rather national security was a precursor of neoliberalism, and sought to create the political conditions for the imposition of austerity.

necessarily-temporary strategy to terrorize into submission – this, too, had ultimately failed, though not without a worldwide massacre of resisters.

And Woody Guthrie – *'Every new grave brings a thousand members'*...Within 15 years of neoliberalism's launch, and within 15 years of national security as bloody pacification of the rebellion that peaked between 1968 and 1973...within 15 years that strategy was altogether scrapped for something else. With Keynes, capital had turned to Marx to understand its own economic workings; now it would turn to one of Marx' most influential sons to rebuild legitimacy.

THATCHER, MANDELA AND THE END OF ALTERNATIVES

WHEN MARGARET THATCHER ANNOUNCED TO *WOMEN'S OWN* MAGAZINE IN 1987, "THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS SOCIETY", THE LEFT EITHER RECOILED IN HORROR OR LAUGHED AT THE PROSPECT THAT ANYONE COULD TAKE SUCH AN OBVIOUSLY-INEPT POSITION. BUT WITHIN A FEW SHORT YEARS ANOTHER THATCHER FAVE - 'THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE' TO THE MARKET - WAS BRANDISHED ON THE LEFT WITH ALARMING REGULARITY.

IT WAS EARLY 1994, AND SID PASSED ALONG TO ME A THICK VOLUME WITH A COVER LIKE RED PAINT ACROSS A WALL - JORGE CASTANEDA'S *UTOPIA UNARMED* WAS THE BOOK OF BOOKS FOR THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT AT THAT MOMENT IN TIME, THE CONFESSIONS OF A LONG-TIME STALWART INTELLECTUAL, WHO IN SOME 450 PAGES WOULD AIR SOCIALISM'S DIRTY LAUNDRY TO THE WORLD AND WONDER HOW MISGUIDED WE EVER COULD HAVE BEEN.

I EXPECTED MASSIVE BACKLASH, A TREMENDOUS OUTRAGE FROM OLD FRIENDS AND COMRADES. BUT THAT NEVER CAME. OH, EVERYONE READ THE BOOK; BUT WHERE THERE WASN'T POSITIVE AGREEMENT WITH CASTANEDA'S CALL TO ABANDON SILLY CLASS REDUCTIONISMS AND DANGEROUS, TOTALITARIAN UTOPIAS, THERE WERE WAN SMILES, DROOPED SHOULDERS, AND RESIGNATION.

I WAS WRITING ON ALL THIS FOR AN ANTHROPOLOGY COURSE AT THE TIME, AND PREPARING A PRESENTATION ON WHAT LAY BEHIND THE ANNOUNCED TRIUMPH OF

DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA. I WAS UP ALL NIGHT, AS IS TYPICAL WHEN I HAVE SOMETHING DUE, AND FINALLY PRINTED OFF THE LAST PAGE SHORTLY AFTER 5:00 IN THE MORNING. I MADE A COFFEE, AND DROPPED ON THE COUCH, CASUALLY FLIPPING ON THE TELEVISION.

PURE DUMB LUCK. I CATCH A LIVE BROADCAST OF NELSON MANDELA AT THE UNITED NATIONS, AND HIT THE RECORD BUTTON SO I CAN TAKE A SHOWER IF THIS GOES ON FOR LONG. IT DOESN'T - BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE LONG TO BE SIGNIFICANT. "THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY HAS NOTHING TO FEAR FROM AN ANC GOVERNMENT" - WORD FOR WORD, THAT'S THE CORE OF THE SPEECH, DELIVERED TO THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

MANDELA WAS REHABILITATED - FROM TERRORIST TO STATESMAN IN A FEW SHORT WORDS - AND I HAD THE CLOSING OF MY PRESENTATION ON TAPE. IF WE NEEDED THE LIMITS OF THIS GLOBAL DEMOCRATIZATION SPELLED OUT FOR US, WHO BETTER TO DELIVER THE MESSAGE THAN THE PRESIDENT OF THE NEWEST IN THE RANKS OF FREE NATIONS, AND A MAN WHOSE REVOLUTIONARY CREDENTIALS WERE BEYOND QUESTION. AND IF MANDELA BELIEVED THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE, WHAT DID THAT SAY ABOUT THE PREVAILING CONVENTIONAL WISDOM?

If we recognize that a market-dominated, iniquitous world is neither natural nor inevitable, that it has not arisen ex-nihilo but is a conscious creation, then it should be possible to set in motion counter-forces and build a counter-project for a different kind of world.

Susan George, "Winning the War of Ideas"

http://www.tni.org/detail_page.phtml?page=archives_george_dissent

Gramsci succeeded in defining a strategy for waging cultural warfare – a tactic that has been adopted by the modern left... The left has been very successful because it understands the importance of culture – of framing the debate and influencing the way people think about problems... Why don't we simply get in the game...

Rush Limbaugh, cited in Bertsch, "Gramsci Rush"
<http://bad.eserver.org/issues/1994/12/bertsch.html>

American industry – the whole capitalist system – lives in the shadow of a volcano. That volcano is public opinion. It is in eruption. Within an incredibly short time it will destroy business or it will save it.

Carl Byoir, cited in Frank, *One Market Under God*, p. 1

Chapter 6

Capital Reads Gramsci:

selling ideology as common sense

By the mid 1980s the politics of state terror had succeeded in mass murder, but had failed to restore anything approaching stability; not only Viet Nam, but also Angola, Mozambique, Portugal, Grenada, Nicaragua and more saw national-security-type regimes crumble, with many others teetering on the brink – the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru. With terror clearly unsustainable, and only deepening instability and rebellion, a new generation of political analysts explored the politics of managing free market reforms – specifically, developing proposals to build a stable environment with enough legitimacy to prevent open revolt, though without so much democracy as to pose a threat to the blueprint of austerity (Burki and Edwards, 1995; Ljunqvist, 1993). The political consensus which took shape – and which prompted international financial institutions, European states and finally the White House to disavow their former allies in counter-insurgency – resulted in a process of swift democratization; economic aid and armaments dried up, negotiations opened with liberal democrats, and military regimes transferred the ship of state to civilian hands (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, 1989). The democratization process, however, was very clearly associated with a continuation of austerity; in fact, it was precisely the failure of national security to impose austerity – the choice seeming to be between ever-rising military spending and ever-expanding civil war, or 'one two,

many Viet Nams' (not to mention Grenadas, Nicaraguas, Irans) - which led to the articulation of a new strategy.

The democratization process, as it emerged in the 1980s, was by design a limited one. Multi-party systems were established, but often through explicit agreement by elite groupings to keep the issue of domestic austerity and debt-service payments off the agenda, and to exclude and isolate the left by co-optation of more moderate, liberal factions (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, 1989: vol.4: 79-81). Professionals, small business owners and centrists were universally welcomed back into politics; where possible, portions of the left leadership were incorporated into the state through power-sharing agreements – El Salvador, South Africa, the Philippines. The result was a new apparatus in which the political landscape was entirely drawn anew, while the socio-economic landscape remained virtually untouched.

Democratization, then, provided for a transition of *regime* (i.e. system of government); but at the level of *state* (i.e. the institution of capital's political rule) the process was marked more by continuity than by change, the crisis not so much resolved as recycled and modernized (Harding and Petras, 1988: 5-6; Nef, 1986: 44). But as this new politics remained firmly wedded to neoliberal anti-statism, its very successes – enhancing the deconstruction of economic intervention – turned quickly to economic blowback: a deepening of crisis, or in the language of capital's top analysts and advisors, "brown areas" (O'Donnell, 1994: 253). Characterized by lack of infrastructure and human capital, competition without rules, and profit-maximization without concern for

sustainability, these "brown areas" were most noted in precisely those regions of Latin American and Africa in which neoliberal policies had been most strictly enforced, and contributed to the development of a global market in which social antagonism was fought out on a terrain of capitalist barbarism, a profoundly unstable, unmarketable field. Crisis remained, with economic growth continuing to lag, down as much as 50% from the days before restructuring (Navarro, 2006: 22-23). When rising demands and popular struggle had made Keynesianism unworkable, capital returned to laissez-faire, mingled with authoritarian politics; when popular struggle threatened to topple the terrorist state, capital democratized its state apparatus while continuing to dismantle meaningful politics; with deepening austerity, political struggle merged with gangsterism, but economic stability remained out of reach, and there was no longer an effective state to mediate the crisis.

There is some hope to be found in the fact that capital has yet to come up with a political apparatus capable of providing legitimacy and stability to the accumulation process (Teeple, 2000: 151-153). That is not to say, however, that twenty years of neoliberal reform have been a complete wash for those who theorized or those who implemented. The restructuring of the world system has certainly provided an ever-increasing concentration of capital. The University of California's *Atlas of Global Inequality* estimates that the richest 1% of the population controls resources equal to the poorest 57 percent (2005). In more human terms, this meant that even only a decade into the reform process "an average middle-class family in a Paris suburb ha[d] an average income more

than one hundred times higher than a rural household in Southeast Asia; a Filipino peasant ha[d] to work for two years to earn what a New York lawyer earns in an hour" (Chossudovsky, 1993: 1). And while it is certainly true that great disparities in wealth are nothing new, the neoliberal program succeeded in exacerbating that inequality (Navarro, 2006: 23). According to the United Nations Development Programme, between 1960 and 1989 the poorest 20% of the world's population saw no significant change in economic standing; the wealthiest 20%, however, increased their share of the global income from 30% to 59%. In North America, it is estimated that overall living standards have declined by 20% since 1973 (Goldner, 2004). In 1981, the net transfer of resources from First World to Third amounted to approximately U.S.\$25 billion; but already by 1988 the balance of transfer had reversed to the tune of over \$50 billion (Oxfam, 1992: 8). And the trend has continued since – in 1988, the ratio of wealth owned by the richest 5% to the poorest 5% was 78 to 1; within five years this had jumped to 114 to 1 (*Atlas*, 2005).

Equally significant, however, is the ideological terrain on which the social-policy framework of Keynesianism was dismantled and the neoliberal agenda pursued. The success with which explicitly anti-worker economic and political policy was instituted, and the degree to which the general populace and even the left simply shrugged and muttered, 'there is no alternative', suggest that capital continued to study the class struggle strategically. Between 1980 and the mid-1990s, a powerful cultural war was fought, if not to win the battle for hearts and minds at least to seize 'common sense' – Hayek meet Gramsci.

*The Class of 21st Century Democracy*⁵⁷:

In the 1970s and 1980s, Anne Krueger, Deepak Lal and other leading theoreticians of neoliberalism were calling for political action to shift the balance of power from workers to capital – as we have seen, they argued that reform would have to be swift and ruthless, to prevent the inevitable organization of dissent from taking substantial form. In spite of their warnings, however, and the best efforts of butchers from Augusto Pinochet to Ferdinand Marcos, organization of dissenters has occurred, and the neoliberal project stalled in key respects. Toward the end of the 1980s, then, culture and rhetoric became key forums of the reform strategy, with key capitalist objectives being recast as issues of human right and philosophy. Lal, for example, has shifted ground in his more recent work, such as “Social Standards and Social Dumping” (1997) and “Morality and Capitalism” (2002); certainly capital’s class analysis remains his over-arching project, but his rhetorical hammer is now replaced with a set of abstract ‘rights’ arguments that attempt to degrade the ethical concerns of resisters.

In “Social Standards...” (1997), Lal argues that legislated labour standards and claims to a universal set of human rights directly contradict the one truly universal and overarching right of liberty; even further, “no general welfare-promoting economic or social rights can be deduced from the general right to liberty” because:

⁵⁷ Portions of this section have been previously published in a paper co-authored by Laura Huey and appearing in *Critical Sociology*, vol. 31, no. 4.

if being human is a fact, no rights can be inferred from it. It may, of course, be necessary that certain conditions must be met before we can fully *function* as human beings. But, again, no question of rights would arise. The function of a lawn mower is to mow lawns, but a broken-down lawn mower cannot be said to have a right to be repaired in order to become, fully and truly, a lawn mower! (Streeten, 1981, cited in Lal, 1997).

What is proposed is a notion of freedom as old as capitalism – an economic freedom, the right of an individual to contract⁵⁸. Workers' only liberty is to be sufficiently free to sell their labour under terms and conditions set by uncoerced – i.e. unregulated - employers. Any concern over the asymmetry of this relationship - precisely the stuff the notion of exploitation is made of -, we are told, is nothing more than an attempt to impose a Western moral standard on the 'free' peoples of other cultures⁵⁹ (Lal, 1997; 2002). In other words, the egalitarianism which underlies redistributive efforts is by definition a Christian ethic, entirely foreign to cultures that have historically accepted "Homo Hierarchicus" (Lal, 2002). The sleight of hand is quite brilliant – discourses of right, need and redistribution are decried as imperialism, whereas discourses of power, exploitation and economic efficiency are celebrated as 'natural'. Working class politics violate human nature and cultural sovereignty; capital's class

⁵⁸ Consider Lal's views on child labour: "although certain types of child labour may not be morally right, it is unclear how such work would infringe any general right (actual or incipient) of the child" (Lal, 1997; accessed February 18, 2003).

⁵⁹ It is ironic that, while decrying the desire of anti-globalization activists to impose their Western (i.e. 'Christian') ethics on the rest of the world, Lal quite explicitly promotes another Western invention – capitalism - while recognizing the overtly 'Christian' nature of capitalism, in terms that seem to consciously echo Weber's (1991 [1904]):

[a market-based] society promotes some virtues (what Shirley Letwin (1992) has labelled the 'vigorous virtues') - such as *hard work, prudence, thrift and self-reliance* ... it may be argued, the ... commercial or capitalist society is neither immoral nor amoral (Lal, 2002: 10; author's italics).

analysis, on the other hand, is profoundly respectful not despite but precisely *because* it privileges a universal economic interest over such complex concepts as rights and needs.

Lal's recent invocation of 'rights discourse' reflects a larger post-neoliberal and yet equally pro-capitalist strategy of the past two decades, in which the message of heightened exploitation and decreased wages is contained within proposals for apparently progressive, or even 'liberating' projects. Examples of this are particularly evident in World Bank policies and research related to their *women in development* (WID) (later *gender and development*) programs. In the late 1980s, the IFIs declared gender a primary concern – and it remains so today. 'What is to be done?' became the question, as capital sought to include the excluded in this latest round of development.

Papers and articles setting forth the WID strategy tend to use terms of 'inclusion', 'liberation' and so on, attempting to lend some feminist credence to the line of argument. But at a deeper level, the *goal* of WID can clearly be recognized as something entirely different. "Engendering Development" (2000), a publication of the World Bank, notes, for example, that:

Gender inequalities reduce productivity in farms and enterprises and thus lower prospects for reducing poverty and ensuring economic progress...and also impose costs on productivity, efficiency, and economic progress...

Efforts to promote greater equality of access to and control of productive resources ... and to ensure fair and equal access to employment opportunities can advance gender equality as well as enhance economic efficiency"

Productivity, work, and economic performance: these are consistently repeated as *the* primary goals of the Bank's strategies. "Investing in women is often a cost-

effective route to broader development objectives such as improved economic performance,” writes the Bank (1989: 59). Substitute *capital accumulation* for *economic performance* and the real issue at hand becomes clear: women are not productive enough for capital; exclusion of women is equally exclusion of *exploitation* of women directly by capital. Certainly, women have always been central to the process of capitalist exploitation, as Maria Mies (1986) has shown, but as capital attempts to restore growth, a more intensive exploitation is required. This is the aim of neoliberal reform, and it is no less the objective of the World Bank’s gender policies, as “Engendering Development” makes explicit:

More broadly, policies and investments that deepen markets and redress gender disparities in access to information—combined with sanctions against those who discriminate—all help strengthen incentives for gender equality in the labor market. In China and Vietnam, for example, the deepening of rural labor markets has brought with it substantial increases in demand for female labor in nonfarm enterprises, opening up new employment and earnings opportunities for women (2000: 17).

The World Bank’s strategists explicitly recognize women as economic actors; that is, as *workers* whose labour is productive of capital. The shift requires that women continue to fulfill the role of housewife (the foundation for the reproduction of capitalism), and fulfill it *better*, in order to allow a cut in the formal wage, while they also move outside of the home into the ‘officially’ productive realm of paid work; that is, accumulation is increased through an intensification of exploitation, the double work-load.

The entire process is couched in feminist-inspired terms of ‘inclusion’ and ‘liberation’. Note the following quote from the World Bank, which lays out the way increased accumulation is to be achieved. Gendered development strategies “generally fall into two classes: some...equip poor women immediately to improve

productivity, while others...build the human capital that enables people...to break out of old molds and seek broader choices" (World Bank, 1989: 59) Aid to poor women, expansion of opportunity: these provide for a benevolent presentation of the project; but that does not alter the underlying message, which is that women must produce more for their families (increase productivity), to allow a cut in the wage; what's more, they must produce directly for capital (expand their choices) *in addition* to maintaining their reproductive role.

It is clear from a close and political reading of capital's texts that the WID strategy is part and parcel of the wider restructuring strategy. Work, productivity, growth - these are the underlying messages, and they are not well hidden: "The gender-based division of labor, unequal economic rights, and labor laws ostensibly designed to protect women from harmful forms of work can all result in rigidities in the allocation of labor that create inefficiencies and lower output ... a less segregated labor force would improve total output" (World Bank, 2001: 2).

A Non-Classed Economics?

The importance of class-meanings to mainstream political and economic analysis is not limited to these few examples; Rudiger Dornbusch⁶¹ (1991: 45) warns that while wage cuts are the ultimate goal, neoliberalism's earlier 'fast and quick'

⁶¹ Rudiger Dornbusch (1942- 2002) was formerly Ford Professor of Economics and International Management at MIT, and an advisor to the Federal Reserve Banks of New York and Boston, the Institute for International Economics and the National Bureau for Economic Research, and sat on the Brookings Panel on Economic Activity.

strategy may be dangerous if the "size of real wage cuts [is] so extreme that on political grounds...the country [may be] too perilous for investment". Alan Rugman⁶² (2001) worries that governments who come to trade negotiations have already been influenced by civil organizations. Jacques K. Polak⁶³ (1991: 32) recommends that the IMF continue to operate on its "unwritten rule that political arguments should be dressed up in economic garb as much as possible". And Guillermo O'Donnell⁶⁴, focusing on the political practicalities, suggests in no uncertain terms that democratically-elected governments are critical to successful economic reform – but that election results may need to be manipulated: "... results cannot be too accurate or representative of the actual distribution of voter preferences. Put in a nutshell, parties of the Right-Centre and Right must be 'helped' to do well (1991: 62)."

The above-reviewed texts illustrate two things: first, that theoreticians of the right have changed their tune in recent years, seeking a softer and more careful approach to policy reform, and acknowledging – though without returning to the partnership strategy of Keynes – a certain utility and political advantage to the provision of some social infrastructure by the state. Secondly, the new

⁶² Alan Rugman is L. Leslie Waters Chair of International Business at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. He was formerly an advisor on international competitiveness to two Canadian Prime Ministers (1986-1993), and served as a member of Canada's International Trade Advisory Committee (1986-1988). He has also been a consultant to Exxon/Imperial Oil, Kodak, Royal Bank of Canada, Northern Telecom, and to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, NAFTA's Commission on Environmental Cooperation, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

⁶³ Jacques J. Polak is President of the Per Jacobssen Foundation, former director of the IMF's Research Department, and advisor to the Institute for International Economics.

⁶⁴ Guillermo O'Donnell is Helen Kellogg Professor of Government and International Studies at Notre Dame University, Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and consultant to numerous governments, policy institutes, and international institutions.

rhetoric indicates an understanding that there is a culture war to be fought, and that the terrain of 'common-sense' and 'core values' is critical to the sustainability of class advantage⁶⁵.

In other words, capital has read and understood its Gramsci⁶⁶. And in this, capital's strategists have done rather well, successfully counterposing in the public mind a class-obsession of the left to a universal rights and morality discourse of capital, when in fact *all* economic and political writings take class into account, and indeed place it quite prominently at the centre of their analyses, even where not explicitly articulated. Presumptions that economic growth is socially-valuable, for example, imply that profitability is an important consideration of any social undertaking, which in turn implies that somewhere, somehow, people are being put to work for wages of some kind, and that some surplus produced by their labour is being accumulated somewhere else. And once that is acknowledged, any serious analytical investigation will be cognizant of the inequalities and social tensions such an arrangement produces. This is the essence of class analysis - an analysis which is always present, even where hidden in apparently classless terms; the point, then, is which side one is aligned

⁶⁵ For more on hegemony and the struggle over cultural norms, see Hall, 1994, and Williams, 1994.

⁶⁶ The reference to the Right's use of Antonio Gramsci's notion of *hegemony* - i.e. the achievement and maintenance of cultural dominance by a class such that basic values and 'common sense' reflect its assumptions and biases while alternative ways of seeing/ thinking appear marginal - has found currency on both the right and the left. Both Rush Limbaugh (cited in Bertsch, 1996) and Susan George (1997) explicitly reference the Italian Marxist in their discussions of the cultural landscape in the 1990s, and Elliott and MacLennan note that conservative ideologues themselves refer to their strategy as *Gramscism du Droite* (1994: 170). For more detailed discussion of *hegemony* see Gramsci, 1971 and Day, 2005).

with, and how one attempts to make sense of economic relationships in order to strategize ways to achieve political goals.

Thomas Frank (2000) has examined in detail the various ways the right has pursued its cultural strategy over the past twenty years. In *One Market Under God* Frank notes that a multi-pronged campaign to either seize for the right or simply discredit entirely the language and values of the left has been quite explicitly waged across the globe, and with frightening success. Though its roots are historic, particularly in the United States where that country's anti-colonial Revolution has long been associated with a Christian individualism, the effort took flight with Thatcherism in the U.K. and Reaganism in the U.S., and peaked in the years after 1989, as the collapse of the Soviet bloc provided geopolitical space for free-marketeers to claim a definitive historic victory, not only over the Soviet menace, but over the very idea of an alternative to liberal capitalism (Fukuyama, 1992).

The 'culture war' strategy can be traced to Barry Goldwater's failed bid for the U.S. Presidency, after which certain conservative strategists identified a need to use the palpable anti-elitism of the 1960s to "channel class hostility against a parasitic 'New Class' lodged in the universities and government bureaucracy" (Bertlet and Quigley, 1995: 169). With the crisis of Keynesianism after 1968-1973, the moment had arrived, and politicians and theorists of the right together embarked upon a campaign to equate the left with bureaucrats, social workers, and educators, adopting populist and egalitarian discourses to erase the economic meaning of class and instead redeploy the concept in expressly

cultural terms. As Dorrien notes, discontent rooted largely in the demise of the welfare state and the very real dislocation of the white male working class was effectively tapped by right Gramscians who pointed the finger at trade unions, the civil rights movement, the dramatic growth in women's participation in the formal labour force, a lack of 'traditional' values, academic and bureaucratic arrogance, and a bloated state that fostered dependency (Dorrien, 1993).

In the U.K., the Thatcher government led the charge toward an 'enterprise culture' with the introduction of workfare schemes that tied the receipt of welfare benefits to job training and apprenticeship, and the launch of an Urban Development Corporation to revitalize – read gentrify – key areas identified with 'the underclass'. The Prime Minister herself waged the rhetorical war, stressing capitalism as a moral code and inequality as a social virtue (Elliott and MacLennan, 1994: 170-171), and rehabilitating the Victorian distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor (Thatcher, 1995). In the U.S., Ronald Reagan presented a populist social conservatism and a renewed emphasis on God and country, in which he invoked for the Republican party an underdog and anti-establishment status which equated free trade, deregulation and welfare reform as progressivism and equity (Davis, 1986). And behind the scenes, funding for conservative research institutes and policy think-tanks exploded, dramatically raising the profile of organizations such as the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute; these churned out reams of papers and policy-analyses,

sponsored academic and political conferences, and built profoundly-effective 'revolving doors' with academic institutions and government (George, 1997).

The re-framing of class (as not only a myth but also a bludgeon of the bully-boys of the left in Thatcher's neo-Hobbesian version⁶⁷, as a shared culture of rugged individualism in Reagan's populism), together with the investment in policy-studies and the flooding of the intellectual market, brought results – as international neoliberal reform tore down borders and took globalization to a new level of intensity with a generally common legal framework in all quarters, and as not unrelated leaps in capital's technological structure facilitated the re-formation of national economies and gave a technical boost to capital's flight from the factory model which had underpinned Keynesian class partnership, a host of formulations flooded the market to celebrate the new era. Old concepts – Daniel Bell's *postindustrial society* thesis a perfect example (Bell, 1973) - were dusted off and redeployed, as were newer variations like John Naisbitt's *Megatrends* and the slightly more progressive *Work of Nations*, by Robert Reich. What they held in common was the notion that a New Economy was in the making, characterized not only by restructuring of the labour process but – most significantly – by a far-reaching democratization (or, in Reich's case, potential democratization) of capitalism such that all could share in the bounty.

The cultural shift was dramatic, as market lingo, competition and economic rationalism invaded the public sector – and the education system in particular (Elliott and MacLennan, 1994) - like never before, and the language of 'rights', 'access' and 'democracy' came to be heard increasingly as catchwords

⁶⁷ See, for example, E.P. Thompson's "Sir, Writing by Candlelight", 1980.

for active and eager participation in the spoils of capitalism's triumph. The new market populism, as Frank refers to it, framed the market as synonymous with popular demand, appropriating the lingo of the left such that mass participation in the stock market was referred to as *dotcommunism* – particularly ironic given that one of the major instigators of the rush to the market was an anticipated collapse of key pillars of the social wage, from unemployment insurance schemes to national pension plans (Frank, 2000: 163). But it extended beyond the market as well; in writings on gender, race, labour and more a subtle witch-hunt emerged, calling out 'political-correctness' as the enemy of individual rights and freedoms and detailing the backlash of 'the people' against cultural domination from a liberal intellectual elite (Scatamburlo, 1998; Wellman, 1997)⁶⁸.

But of particular interest through all of this was the interaction of religion and secularism in the new cultural consensus. By 1989, middle-income groups the world over had largely turned in faith for liberal rationalism (plus a little recreational spirituality of self-improvement, based for the most part on superficial readings of eastern religious practices such as yoga and meditation); the working poor and unemployed, on the other hand, were flocking to a new calling – southern U.S.-based evangelism - which had been carefully laying its groundwork since the perceived infiltration of the mainstream churches by the left from the early 1970s⁶⁹. Though coming from different directions, both flooded

⁶⁸ See also Rees (1993) and Keys and Silvergate (1998).

⁶⁹ Mainstream Christianity has always had its radical side; With the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, and the formation of the World Council of Churches ecumenical social activism, however, that radicalism began to permeate widely, with African and Latin American churches, moving most explicitly towards a radical political engagement. See in particular Gustavo Gutierrez' 1971 classic, *A Theology of Liberation*.

airwaves and news-stands with a decrying of faltering morality – evidenced in everything from teen pregnancy and gang warfare to big government and unemployment – and laid the blame squarely upon the welfare state and liberal public education (Elliott and MacLennan, 1994: 167-169). This morality discourse, and the mythologizing or “minstrelism” (Wellman 1997: 312-313) that accompanied it, emphasized personal responsibility over social critique, community voluntarism over social assistance programs, truth over political correctness – thereby framing as ‘the establishment’ anything associated with the left, and counter-posing this to a lost tradition of hard work, straight-talk and good neighbours (Hall, 1986). In a brilliant reversal of roles, capital’s core values were written as the natural, down-to-earth and common-sense values of working people, while the left emerged as a caricatured fat cat or ivory-tower intellectual; even further, ‘hip’ millionaires became the ‘thinkers’ of the day, their business ethics for the everyman finding space on every coffee table while critical commentary on literature, social theory, philosophy evaporated into the ether like so much hot air (Frank, 2000: 277-78 and 289-90; Hedges, 2007).

Capital’s culture war was profoundly successful, as new-age individualist spirituality over-ran middle-income earners and professionals while southern conservative preachers successfully turned themselves into globe-trotting builders of community, chalking up particular successes in Asia, Africa and Latin America. By the late 1980s this discourse had entered the White House, with then U.S.-President George Bush’s call for ‘1000 points of light’, a new spirit of voluntarism to hold together social infrastructure while the state moved to get out

of the business of welfare; and the churches responded, offering not only informal community assistance, but public services, too, including addiction counseling, day-care and welfare (Ehrenreich, 2004).

The left, meanwhile, beat a hasty retreat, adopting Thatcher's mantra 'there is no alternative' as their own. Facing the collapse of state socialism on the one hand, and rightist appropriation of the discourse of disenfranchisement on the other, parties of the left purged or isolated the unrepentant radicals in their midst and moved to the centre, facilitating a rightward shuffle in electoral politics in which socialists and social democrats worldwide renounced precisely the discourses, alliances, and policy-frameworks that had distinguished them in the past. This was the windfall after socialism's crumbling - communists licking their wounds with the collapse of the eastern bloc, trade unions "wide-eyed and listening to the fearful sounds of death's rattle and creak" (Finnamore, 2004; Thompson, 1980b).

We had entered what Eduardo Galeano calls, *the looking-glass school*, in which "lead learns to float and cork to sink. Snakes learn to fly and clouds drag themselves along the ground" (2000: 5). But as Raymond Williams reminds us, *hegemony* is not a fact of dominance, but an active process of struggle (Williams, 1994: 597-598), and only ever partial and contingent. To be sure, then, something would undoubtedly shift; for though the looking-glass school emphasized studies in amnesia, resignation, and impotence, there was something more that remained - for "there is no school that does not beget its counterschool" (Galeano, 2000: 8).

DIGGERS, SAFRON-WALDEN TO VANCOUVER, 1992

IN 1992, EN ROUTE FROM ZIMBABWE TO VANCOUVER, I SPEND A WEEK IN ENGLAND WITH PAT — ANARCHIST, ATHEIST AND NOW PRACTITIONER OF HOMEOPATHY — AND HER HUSBAND DEREK — CHRISTIAN RADICAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST NOW WORKING AT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S ASIA DESK. SAFRON-WALDEN, THIS SMALL TOWN AN HOUR BY TRAIN FROM LONDON TEEMS WITH GHOSTS OF ANOTHER AGE, ITS WIDE COBBLESTONE STREETS MADE FOR HORSE AND CARRIAGE, ITS TREMENDOUS PUBLIC GARDEN A GATHERING PLACE FOR GOSSIP AND HISTORY, A TANGLE OF BERRIES, POTATOES, CHILDREN'S GAMES AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

DEREK HAS DECIDED PUBLIC GARDENING IS A PROFOUNDLY REVOLUTIONARY ACT, AND EXCITEDLY LEADS ME THROUGH THE ROWS OF VEGETABLES AND FRUITS THAT FEED A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THIS COMMUNITY YEAR-ROUND. WE PAUSE TO TOUCH THE SCULPTURES AND PAINTINGS THAT HAVE EMERGED, SOME PURPOSELY, SOME BY ACCIDENT, OVER GENERATIONS.

PAT BRINGS A POT OF TEA TO THE LIVING ROOM AND PICKS OUT A FEW BOOKS FROM THE SHELF — DIGGER TRACTS, HYMNS TO RANTERS, LEVELLERS AND OTHER REVOLUTIONARIES OF THE 1649 ENGLISH CIVIL WAR, AND CHRISTOPHER HILL'S *THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN*. I DIVE INTO THE STRUGGLE OVER COMMON LANDS IN EUROPE, FINDING HERE THE SAME VOICES, STRUGGLES AND VIOLENCES THAT TODAY ENGULF THE COMMUNAL LANDS AROUND SHAMU IN NEOLIBERAL SOUTHERN AFRICA. AND HERE I SEE BATTLES FOR COMMON SPACE AS SO MUCH MORE THAN LAND — FAMILY,

COMMUNITY, WORK, FOOD, SONG AND DANCE AND SEX AND PLAY AND HEALING AND ON AND ON: THIS IS A HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS BEFORE THE WORKING CLASS, A COMMUNISM THAT EXTENDS FAR INTO HISTORY AND REVERBERATES STILL IN THE SQUARE OF PUBLIC SPACE THAT IS THE COMMUNITY GARDEN.

ARRIVING IN VANCOUVER DAYS LATER, MY PARENTS HAVE MOVED TO THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE, WHERE I DISCOVER MORE TRAJECTORIES OF THIS MOVEMENT TO RECLAIM SPACE OUTSIDE OF CAPITAL. ROOFTOPS OF THE SINGLE-ROOM OCCUPANCY HOTELS ARE NURTURING PLANTS AND AN OCCASSIONAL CHICKEN. CYCLISTS ARE CLAIMING A STRETCH OF ROAD FROM SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY TO UBC AS THEIR OWN; A CATHOLIC WORKER HOUSE HAS OPENED ITS DOORS ON EAST PENDER TO HOST WHOEVER PASSES THROUGH IN NEED FOR A DAY, A WEEK, A MONTH.

OR PERHAPS NONE OF THIS IS REALLY NEW, BUT I AM SEEING COMMUNISM MORE BROADLY, AS ACT OF BEING, ACT OF CREATING – A VERB, NOT A NOUN; A ROAD, NOT A PLACE.

The logic of capitalist production perfected in the factory now invests all forms of social production equally. The same might be said also for the school, the prison, the hospital, the other disciplinary institutions. Social space is smooth, not in the sense that it has been cleared of the disciplinary striation, but rather in that those striae have been uniformly generalized across society. Social space has not been emptied of the disciplinary institutions, but completely filled with the modulations of control. The subsumption of society in the state is thus not formal but real...[it] sets the state in motion directly through the perpetual circuitry of social production.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus*, p. 260

*Thou hast many bags of money, and behold I (the Lord)
come as a thief in the night, with my sword drawn in my hand,
and like a thief as I am – I say deliver your purse, deliver sirrah!
deliver or I'll cut thy throat.*

*I say (once more) deliver, deliver my money...to rogues,
thieves, whores and catpurses, who are flesh of thy flesh,
and every whit as good as thyself in mine eyes, who are
ready to starve in plaguy gaols and nasty dungeons...*

My hand is outstretched still...

*Have ALL THINGS in common, or else the plague of God
will rot and consume all that you have.*

Abiezer Coppe, cited in Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, p. 211

Chapter 7

After Neoliberalism:

'post-civil' capitalism and the continuing problem of the commons

Whatever the limits to the success of neoliberalism's deconstruction of the state, a core – and perhaps *the* core - feature of that strategy was the expansion of capital's logic from the economy-proper into territory previously outside its domain. It was a change that did not go un-noticed, and scholars have spent the decades since proposing, debating, and re-proposing conceptual frameworks to make sense of this new era. For some, the term *post-Fordism* captures the political moment, highlighting its implications for corporate organization and labour processes; for others, *neoliberalism* is still the preferred label, stressing as it does an unadulterated *laissez-faire* without the democratic pretense of traditional liberalism; and of course stalwarts rooted in Bell's *post-industrial society* approach, too, attempt to locate the current political-economic-cultural dynamics in massive technological advance (Bell, 1973). And there were newer contributions as well; from Ohmae's *borderless world* (Ohmae, 1990) to Castell's *network society* (2000) to the generic and pervasive *globalization* (Giddens, 1999). But perhaps the most widespread, at least on the left, was the notion of *late capitalism*. Initially used by Frankfurt School theorists to describe the socialized capitalism common to Keynesianism, fascism and varieties of socialism and later associated with Habermas' analysis of post-industrialism and effective state management of social conflict (Habermas, 1989; Jameson, 1991)

late capitalism has come to refer broadly to a social world marked by internationalization of business, re-organization of labour processes, pervasive computerization, de-stabilization of traditional identities, and a post-modern or post-structural cultural logic. But in this outpouring of work, and running through each variant, we see the legacy of capital's offensive of the 1970s and 1980s – a wide-ranging reconfiguration of the public/ private boundary and a sea-change in how we conceptualize the interrelationships of capital, state, and civil society.

Neoliberal democratization, as discussed in the previous chapter, saw both a shrinkage of the territory devoted to the state and an extension of capitalist relationships into what had previously been considered 'civil' domains. And here the notion of civil society becomes significant, not simply because it has been increasingly relied upon in social theory (see Chapter 8), but because the term has come to be not only associated with classlessness but deployed explicitly against class-based conceptual frameworks. With its origins in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, civil society refers to the sphere of non-state, non-family relationships in which liberalism's self-maximizing individuals work, play, love and become 'the social' (Hegel, 1967: 122-3). It is a concept which claims jurisdiction over a wide variety of institutions in which social subjects construct their daily lives outside of the boundaries of the formal state apparatus. Given its general association with all-things 'everyday', then, the term has come to refer to a sphere of daily life outside of and beyond the relations of power we sociologists call 'structural forces'⁷⁰. But as the concept of civil society exploded in the wake

⁷⁰ It should be noted, however, that Hegel's notion of civil society did not exclude relationships of power such as class, though they may not have been expressed in precisely those terms. As

of the 1968-1973 struggles and the campaign to shrink the state, some voices began to suggest that neoliberalism's great legacy could best be understood as something profoundly deeper - the abolition of civil society altogether.

Hardt and Negri refer to the period since capital's neoliberal offensive as *post-civil capitalism*, or "the real subsumption of society under capital" (Hardt and Negri, 1994: 17). It is an era defined by the dissolution of the state/ civil society dichotomy and the investment of the entire social fabric with a logic of capital. That is, post-civil capitalism, in their view, is marked by a blurring of boundaries between factory and society, public and private, as apparently 'extra-political' or 'extra-economic' institutions become thoroughly imbued with capitalist relations. The family, the school, the prison – in each case, the institution's formerly autonomous function becomes generalized throughout the society. Power is decentred, but only insofar as it is made general – capital appears to be nowhere precisely because it is everywhere; the working class appears absent precisely because we are all workers, in the home, the school, the community. Harkening back to Marx, "not the state, but civil society has withered away" (Hardt and Negri, 1994: 259).

Hardt and Negri may set up a bit of a straw-man, suggesting that the notion of civil society is inherently incompatible with a world after neoliberalism; Ehrenberg (1998) and Tilly (1988), for example, both demonstrate that no strict delineation between capital, state and society has ever been possible, nor have social relations or even particular social movements ever operated strictly in any

John Ehrenberg reminds us, 'Hegel knew his Adam Smith. The invisible hand can turn selfishness into enlightenment and transform egoists into the self-conscious and respected members of civil society' (Ehrenberg, 1998: 21).

one sphere or the other. And Harry Cleaver, going further, notes that the foundation of a Marxist analysis is precisely that there can be no separation between the political, the economic, and the cultural – class is everywhere, not to the exclusion of other dynamics but intimately bound up with them (Cleaver, 1986). Nonetheless, Hardt and Negri do remind us that reliance on the notion of civil society implies a sphere outside of or beyond state and capital, and effectively imagines away the extended reach of class and succeeds only in emptying both ‘capitalism’ and ‘civil society’ of their analytic value, leaving an undefineable sphere of everything and nothing. And the idea of post-civil capitalism, then, illuminates the poverty of traditional approaches which treated ‘the economic’, ‘the political’, ‘the cultural’ and so on as somehow distinct spheres of life or of social analysis; for while in geopolitical terms it may appear the ‘borderless world’ we hear so much of is a fiction, neoliberal globalization has certainly demonstrated for us that in social relationships it is quite the opposite.

And the implications are political, too. For if there is no political space outside of capital, no civil space outside of the state, where does that leave struggles for social change? For some, such as Richard Day, the result is a retreat from the very notion of far-reaching solidarity and from the idea of revolution, and their replacement with smaller-scale political projects centred upon a particular affinity (Day, 1995). For others, post-civil capitalism provides more promise precisely because it forces resistance out of the formal organized channels and into the realm of relationships not only against but *beyond* command (Surin, 1996; Negri, 1991).

The Continuing Problem of the Commons

In these times, it seems appropriate to begin any inquiry into struggle with an explicit acknowledgement of the violence of political-economy, and from a perspective which treats the crisis of organized labour, economic restructuring and violence – whether in Baghdad streets or at a WTO forum on the Mediterranean – not as contemporaneous, but as largely synonymous. That is, it makes sense to start from the beginning, from the premise that the current process of globalization *is* a process of violence, a process of *enclosure*, akin to that associated with capitalism's ascendancy in Europe, its ongoing and never-complete conquest, and suggestive as well of a primitive accumulation of a new stage of capital.

I start with the Midnight Notes Collective, a network of Marxist/ anarchist/ poststructuralist/ autonomist activist-intellectuals based in the U.S. Drawing parallels to the processes of primitive accumulation which laid the groundwork for the rise of capitalism in Europe and their counterparts in conquest and colonialism, Midnight Notes argues that the defining character of policymaking since the rise of neoliberalism has been *enclosure*: the aggressive pursuit of a process by which social wealth – not only lands, rivers, ideas, but entitlements, social benefits, democratic procedures – is to be wrested from collectivities and fenced off for the exclusive use of capital and the extension of market logic to ever-more spheres of life (Midnight Notes, 1990). Not limited to a Great Transformation à la Polanyi (2001), the enclosures are, for these activist-

intellectuals, a *continuing* feature of capitalist expansion, operating in times of ease predominantly through the symbolic violence of economic 'laws', and in times of crisis through naked repression and terror. Here, then, those processes variously named *neoliberalism*, *globalization*, *post-Fordism* and so on are intimately bound up with political and military strategies at both state and global levels. What is more, collectively they are a feature of capitalist development which constitutes neither something fundamentally different nor simply more of the same – they are, rather, about *enclosure*, a recurring round of violence designed to respond to crisis, to reassert capital's logic, to reinvigorate accumulation. Profoundly different from capitalist strategy in the Keynesian era, certainly; part and parcel of capitalism, no doubt – the notion of enclosure contains both of these, but is limited to neither.

Enclosure comes to the left as a historical phenomenon, named for the process, over two hundred years, by which Europe's geographic and political-economic landscape was forcibly re-mapped, concentrating land and resources in the hands of ascendant capitalists and creating that mass of people with no means of subsistence but to sell their labour-power. Referring to the fencing in of territory that had previously been held in common, *enclosure* represents the European trajectory of colonization, with the same key features – conquest of land, by force; elimination of subsistence-based agriculture, by force; imposition

of a labour regime including both waged and unwaged components, again by force⁷².

The real utility of the term, however, is in its explicit linking of class formation with violence. Taken historically, the *enclosure* period explodes the myth that capitalism either arose naturally from the growth of something called civilization or evolved through the expansion of individual rights. To the contrary, the legislation and enforcement measures employed throughout Europe share considerable ground with those put to use in the conquest and colonization of Africa, Asia and Latin America— the seizure of land, the wresting of resources, the enforcement of labour, at first and as necessary through formal enslavement, where possible via legislation on vagabondage, construction of penal workhouses, and always and everywhere by basic subsistence needs - and to the same end.

There is no need here to revisit well-established history. For our purposes it is enough to note that the process of *enclosure* goes far beyond 15th and 16th century Europe (Hill, 1975; Polanyi, 2001), but is seen - under the names 'colonization' or 'the civilizing mission' – across the globe from the first arrival of Columbus on what he called Hispaniola, and throughout the colonial period - as late as the 1980s in southern Africa, and today in territories as diverse as Puerto Rico and Palestine (Rodney, 1981; Zinn, 1980). And it is a process continuing under a new name at the end of the twentieth century, as the remaining

⁷² For a cursory review of the European enclosures see Marx, 1962, vol.1 (particularly the chapter on primitive accumulation of capital),. For more detailed analysis, see Thompson (1980) and Polanyi (2001).

commons – cultural and intellectual as well as economic – are privatized, corporatized, enclosed with a brutality reminiscent of earlier conquests.

In their *Multitude*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri expand the notion of the commons from the traditional definition as pre- (or non-) capitalist shared spaces to the more generalized collaborations of production and reproduction. That is, the commons can be understood to exist wherever and whenever people collectively think/ act/ interact to produce the conditions of their lives outside of and – whether explicitly or not – in opposition to capital. A community garden in the Downtown Eastside; a collective kitchen operating out of a neighbourhood house; wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia that can be edited and re-written by any user; file-sharing technologies by which teenagers make their music and videos available for others; the monthly naked bike-rides through downtown Vancouver organized by the Work Less Party and cycling collectives; all of these can be understood as commons in that they are produced in common and for the collective good – actively operating in reverse to capital. What is more, participation in such commons, Hardt and Negri argue, hearkens precisely to the old IWW motto, 'building the new world in the shell of the old', and classic Marxist formulations regarding self-valorization – workers' autonomous activity which produces relationships beyond capital through the practice of creating without and against capital. In the authors' words, activity which "brings about an anthropological transformation such that out of the struggles come a new humanity" (2004: 213).

One need not look far to see struggles over the commons around us today. As US forces moved into Iraq, they brought with them trucks loaded with water to be *sold* to the now-free communities; it was a small indication of how important the struggle over water has become and an indication that the American Empire was clearly aware that water resources were to be a crucial field in the struggle over the remaining commons (Perkins, 2004: 183). Indeed, that public water is in the sights of capital is apparent in all corners of the world – from Bolivia, where water privatization schemes sparked rioting in 2003, to South Africa, where former socialists of the African National Congress have been entering into partnerships with private capital to tap water resources (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/features/water>) to here in BC, where unions and ecologists have joined forces to challenge plans to privatize water treatment plants. Even more widespread have been struggles over the genetic sequences of life itself as evidence in the patenting of specific genes and Monsanto corporation's massive campaign to copyright the genetic material in seeds, thereby monopolizing production of certain basic foods. Over the past years, Canadian and American courts have given their blessing to the inclusion of genetic material in a rapidly-expanding intellectual property regime which seeks to assign ideas, cultural artifacts, and subsistence itself commodity status. Such incursions into public knowledge and culture have sparked a vibrant resistance across the globe, and most notably by India's "Seeds of Freedom", an organization of small-scale farmers who recognize that the "monopoly ownership of life creates an unprecedented crisis for agricultural and food security, by

transforming biological resources from commons into commodities" (Shiva, 1993: 121). Closer to home is the ongoing struggle over knowledge at public universities, as institutions seek to wrest intellectual property rights from faculty and students, donors demand input into university governance and even curriculum, and administrations re-cast teaching and learning as commodities, and students as clients.

These are only a few examples of where the battle-lines of public space are currently drawn; what is significant, though, is that in each case we are beyond capital's tangible conquest of land and into a whole new terrain of knowledge, culture, reproduction. Here, then, is a new commons, and a commons beyond the noun we are used to having described for us; and here, too, we might just discover commons as activity, common-ing as a verb, and a renewed emphasis on that sticky stuff class is made of – relationship, collective activity, and production that is not work but directly and immediately use-value. It sounds at first a bit of fancy. But the real struggles around such activity are many, and the stakes high.

CRISES AND POTENTIALS

REVOLUTION FROM CATHOLICISM TO THE YIPPIES

IN 1973 MY PARENTS RETURNED TO BC FROM A TWO-YEAR CUSO STINT IN NIGERIA, THREE YOUNG BOYS IN TOW. IN ONE STEP UP FROM THE LUMBER MILLS OF VANCOUVER ISLAND, MY DAD FOUND WORK IN KITIMAT, WORKING A WHITE COLLAR JOB FOR A MAJOR MINING COMPANY. MY MOM JUMPED INTO POLITICAL WORK ON AFRICA, BEGINNING WITH THE COMMUNITY SHE KNEW BEST – THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. WE DIDN'T LAST LONG IN KITIMAT. MOM WRANGLERD AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK AT THE CHURCH ABOUT OUR EXPERIENCES IN AFRICA, AND CLOSED OFF WITH A STATEMENT TO THE EFFECT THAT THE CHURCH WAS THE WHORE OF IMPERIALISM. IN HER VIEW, THIS WAS JUST GOOD CHRISTIANITY; BUT THE CONGREGATION, AND THE LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP, EVIDENTLY TOOK A DIFFERENT VIEW. THE GREENS LEFT TOWN.

WE DIDN'T, HOWEVER, LEAVE THE CHURCH. FOR THE NEXT 15 YEARS, MOM AND DAD WORKED AND ORGANIZED THROUGH CATHOLIC NETWORKS TO FOSTER WHAT BECAME WIDELY KNOWN IN THE 80S AS LIBERATION THEOLOGY. THIS WAS ANTICAPITALIST, ANTIRACIST, FEMINIST WORK. THIS MADE COMMON CAUSE WITH REVOLUTIONARIES IN LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA, SOUTHEAST ASIA. THIS WAS A CHURCH WITH CLOSE LINKS TO ARMED RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS. IT WAS A CHURCH THAT TOOK SERIOUSLY THE CHRISTIAN COMMAND TO BE AMONG THE POOR; AND IT WAS A REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT BUILT ON THE CHURCH, WITH STRICT MORAL CODES, DISDAIN FOR MEANINGLESS PLEASURE-SEEKING, AND WITHIN WHICH THE GREATEST WERE THOSE WHO ARTICULATED NO DESIRES, NO NEEDS, BUT SUBMITTED EVERY MOMENT AND EVERY DAY TO SERVICE, AND – ULTIMATELY – WHO DIED FOR THEIR COMRADES.

BUT THE CHURCH-BASED ACTIVISTS WERE NOT ALONE IN THEIR ARTICULATION OF REVOLUTION AS DUTY, AS A DOUR ACTIVITY OF SACRIFICE AND SELF-DENIAL. A LONG-STANDING COMMUNIST TRADITION ARTICULATED SIMILAR VALUES, CONDEMNING THE SELF-INDULGENCE OF DRINK, DRUGS, LEISURE, SEX. NO REST TIL THE REVOLUTION WAS A MOTTO EQUALLY SHARED BY CATHOLICS AND COMMUNISTS IN THIS STRUGGLE.

I RECALL FINDING A COPY OF JERRY RUBIN'S *DO IT* ON MY PARENTS' BOOKSHELF SOMETIME IN THE MID 1980S. I WAS APPALLED BY THE ANARCHY AND DEPRAVITY, BY THE IDEA THAT THESE WHITE KIDS SOMEHOW THOUGHT THEY COULD MAKE A REVOLUTION WITHOUT HARD WORK, SOMEHOW THOUGHT THAT SEX AND BOOZE AND SLEEP AND MUSIC HELP SOME ANTI-CAPITALIST POTENTIAL. I SCOFFED, I DISMISSED, AND I TURNED MY DISDAIN ON EVERY KID IN MY HIGHSCHOOL WHO GOT STONED AT LUNCH — CONDEMNING THEM AS PETIT-BOURGEOIS PARTY-MAKERS WHOSE INDULGENCE WAS PAID FOR BY THOSE IN GUATEMALA, SALVADOR AND ANGOLA WHO WERE TOO BUSY FIGHTING TO WORRY ABOUT WHEN THEY'D NEXT GET LAID.

BUT SOMETHING STRUCK ME ABOUT THAT TIME, AND IF I NEVER REALLY BOUGHT THE YIPPIES WHOLESAL, I CERTAINLY RETAINED SOME SENSE THAT THAT PERIOD OF TIME — 1968–1973 — WAS IMPORTANT. ACROSS CONTINENTS, ACROSS SECTORS OF POPULATON, ACROSS IDEOLOGIES, THIS FIVE-YEAR PERIOD WITNESSED AN INCREDIBLE EXPLOSION OF STRUGGLE, DEBATE, EXPERIMENTATION, CREATIVITY, IN WHICH

CONSERVATISM WAS AS MUCH A FEATURE OF LEFT PARTIES AND TRADE UNIONS AS IT WAS OF THE NIXONS, GOLDWATERS AND KISSINGERS.

THE TURNING-POINT FOR ME WAS 'WORK' VS 'ZEROWORK'. IN THE POST-COLD-WAR WORLD, AS I WAS DETERMINED TO HOLD THE LINE AGAINST CLASS-NEUTRAL POST-MODERNISMS, I FOUND THAT FEW OF THE OLD LEFT PUBLISHING-HOUSES STILL HAD ANYTHING TO SAY, AND THE BULK OF ACADEMIC WORK ON MARXISM CONSISTED OF CONFESSIONALS FROM FORMER BELIEVERS AND LEFT TRANSLATIONS OF THATCHER'S 'THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE'. STUNNED AT THE EASE WITH WHICH OLD MARXISTS JUMPED SHIP, I JOINED UP WITH AN ECLECTIC READING GROUP OF SFU FACULTY AND GRADUATE STUDENTS WHO WERE EXPLORING A POST-SOCIALIST CLASS THEORY. MIKE LEBOWITZ WAS THE MOST ORTHODOX OF THE BUNCH, BUT WILLING TO READ AND DEBATE MARGINAL TRADITIONS SO LONG AS THEY DIDN'T CROSS THE BOUNDS INTO ANARCHISM. JULIAN PRIOR, DOROTHY KIDD AND BOB EVERTON HAD MORE LIBERTARIAN COMMUNIST BACKGROUNDS, AND BROUGHT FORWARD LITERATURE FROM THE SITUATIONISTS AND CERTAIN CRITICAL POST-STRUCTURALISTS — DELEUZE, GUATTARI, FOUCAULT. AND CONRAD HEROLD, WHO OFFERED THE MEETING SPACE AND COFFEE FOR THESE GATHERINGS, FED US ON OLD MIMEOGRAPHED BROADSHEETS POORLY-TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN, CLR JAMES AND RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA.

FOR TWO YEARS WE READ AND DEBATED AND DISCUSSED. I RE-READ MY MARX, AND THOUGHT ABOUT THE CENTRALITY OF LABOUR RATHER THAN SPECIFIC FORMS OF PROPERTY. I FOLLOWED THE CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT AS A CONCEPT, AND THE ANTI-GROWTH, ANTI-ECONOMY WRITINGS OF RADICAL ECOLOGISTS. I EXPLORED THE

REPRESSIVE HISTORY OF SOCIALISM, FROM KRONSTADT SAILORS TO NORTH KOREAN SCHOOLS. I EXAMINED (FINALLY) THE SINO-SOVIET SPLIT, THE STALIN-TROTSKY WAR, THE FRACTURING OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTIES AFTER 1968. AND I BEGAN MY M.A. RESEARCH ON CUBA, ATTEMPTING TO MAKE SENSE OF THAT COUNTRY'S SOCIALISM FROM TWO DISTINCT PERSPECTIVES — A PRAGMATIC, DISTRIBUTION-BASED ANALYSIS, AND ANOTHER MORE DECONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH, WHICH LOOKED AT STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL ORDER AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR LABOUR DISCIPLINE.

AND IT SUDDENLY MADE SENSE TO ME WHAT I'D HEARD FROM ATHENE IN CUBA — HOW THAT REVOLUTION MAKES SOCIALISTS OF ANARCHISTS, AND ANARCHISTS OF SOCIALISTS. AND AS I RETURNED TO THAT ISLAND TO CONDUCT INTERVIEWS FOR MY THESIS, I LEFT MY UNIVERSITY OF HAVANA GUEST HOUSING FOR A BED WITH A CLEANING WOMAN AND SOMETIME BLACK-MARKETEER. AND INSTEAD OF SPEAKING OF WESTERN IMPERIALISM TO COMMUNIST PARTY REPRESENTATIVES, I SPOKE ABOUT THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN EQUALITY AND TOURIST-ONLY ZONES WITH HEAVY-METAL KIDS IN HAVANA SUBURBS. AND INSTEAD OF GOING TO THE OFFICIAL FILM FESTIVAL, I DRANK RUM AND DANCED WITH DRAG-QUEENS AND PRACTITIONERS OF AFRICAN MAGIC IN LOUD, CRAMPED DANCE-HALLS.

AND PIECE BY PIECE, AS CUBANS TAUGHT ME THAT THE WORK OF SOCIALISM REQUIRES THAT ON OCCASION ONE GETS A LITTLE LIT UP AND FLIRTS OR FUCKS; AND AS TRANNIES TAUGHT ME THAT CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES IS IMPORTANT AND A NEW GENERATION OF REVOLUTIONARY AND PLAYFUL FEMINISTS ADVISED I GET OUT OF THE BOOKS AND DANCE, I BEGAN TO SEE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JERRY

RUBIN AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE LEFT – CAUSE EVEN IF THOSE YIPPIES WERE JUST SPOILED WHITE KIDS LOOKING FOR THRILLS, CAN I HONESTLY SAY I'M ANY DIFFERENT? AND WHO WANTS A REVOLUTION JUST TO WORK MORE? ISN'T THE WHOLE POINT TO DISMANTLE THIS IMPOSED LABOUR, THIS GROWTH-ECONOMY? AND WHOSE INTEREST DOES RESTRAINT REALLY SERVE, ANYWAY?

CELEBRATION AND PLAY WERE STARTING TO LOOK REAL REVOLUTIONARY. AND IF THE 1868-1973 REBELLIONS DIDN'T LEAVE US BOOKS AND BOOKS ON A NEW REVOLUTIONARY THEORY, THEY DID LEAVE US SOMETHING EVEN MORE IMPORTANT – A LESSON IN PLAY, WHICH CARRIED WITHIN IT A COMPLETE RE-THINKING OF SOCIAL ANALYSIS, OF ORGANIZATION, OF RESISTANCE, OF REVOLUTION, AND OF POWER.

The rue Gay-Lussac still carries the scars of the 'night of the barricades'. Burnt out cars line the pavement, their carcasses a dirty grey under the missing paint. The cobbles, cleared from the middle of the road, lie in huge mounds on either side. A vague smell of tear gas still lingers... At the junction with the rue des Ursulines lies a building site, its wire mesh fence breached in several places. From here came material for at least a dozen barricades: planks, wheelbarrows, metal drums, steel girders, cement mixers, blocks of stone. The site also yielded a pneumatic drill. The students couldn't use it, of course - not until a passing building worker showed them how, perhaps the first worker actively to support the student revolt. Once broken, the road surface provided cobbles, soon put to a variety of uses...

Mural propaganda is an integral part of the revolutionary Paris of May 1968. It has become a mass activity, part and parcel of the Revolution's method of self-expression. The walls of the Latin Quarter are the depository of a new rationality, no longer confined to books, but democratically displayed at street level and made available to all. The trivial and the profound, the traditional and the esoteric, rub shoulders in this new fraternity, rapidly breaking down the rigid barriers and compartments in people's minds.

<http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/disband/solidarity/may68.html>

One truly amazing aspect of May '68 was the way the protest encircled the globe: Saturday May 11, 50,000 students and workers marched on Bonn, and 3,000 protesters in Rome; on May 14, students occupied the University of Milan; a sit-in at the University of Miami on May 15; scuffles at a college in Florence on May 16; a red flag flew for three hours at the University of Madrid on the 17th; and the same day, 200 black students occupied the administration buildings of Dower University; on May 18 protests flared up in Rome, and more in Madrid where barricades and clashes with the police occurred; on May 19, students in Berkeley were arrested; a student protest in New York; an attack on an ROTC center in Baltimore - the old world seemed to be on the ropes.

On May 20, Brooklyn College was occupied by blacks, and occupations took place the next day at the University of West Berlin. On May 22, police broke through barricades at Columbia University. The University of Frankfurt and the University of Santiago were occupied on May 24. Protests in Vancouver and London in front of the French Embassy on May 25. On Monday May 27, university and high school students went on strike in Dakar. Protests by peasants in Belgium on May 28. On May 30, students in Munich protested, as did students in Vienna the next day. On June 1, protests spread to Denmark and Buenos Aires. The next day the Yugoslav insurrection began. In Brasil, 16,000 students went on strike on June 6, followed by a large protest march in Geneva for democratization of the university. Even in Turkey, 20,000 students occupied the universities in Ankara and other cities. The chronology just keeps going as occupations, protests, scandals and barricades continued throughout the summer in Tokyo, Osaka, Zurich, Rio, Rome, Montevideo, Bangkok, Dusseldorf, Mexico City, Saigon, Cochabamba, La Paz, South Africa, Indonesia, Chicago, Venice, Montreal, Auckland.

Len Bracken, Guy Debord, Revolutionary
<http://www.neravt.com/left/may1968.htm>

Chapter 8

Lessons from the Class Struggle:

the 1968-1973 rebellions and the poverty of class theory⁷³

In her "From Redistribution to Recognition? dilemmas of justice in a 'post-socialist' age", Nancy Fraser argues that an effective and solidaristic left must draw together class analysis and social deconstruction in order to effectively undermine the 'relations of ruling' which continue to structure our lives along lines of class, gender, race and sexuality (1995). For Fraser, the class analysis goal of redistribution begins with a logic of universalism, whereas the recognition associated with post-structuralist logic seeks to highlight specificity and difference, begging the question of how these two might be brought together in a meaningful way (Fraser, 1995: 7—74). The article has inspired extensive discussion, prompting responses from such thinkers as Judith Butler and Richard Rorty, and can be taken as an indication that something is happening on the contemporary left - a dialogue is beginning across sectors, across movements, across the modern/ post-modern divide. The question, however, remains: does the deconstructionist work of poststructuralism promise to generate political engagement with concrete relations of power and inequality, or does its emphasis on cultural/ discursive deconstruction distract from or contradict the liberatory project of the class-oriented left?

For Fraser, the compatibility of class theory and deconstruction is significant, if not apparent; in her view, both seek a profound transformation of

⁷³ A version of this chapter has been previously published in *Critical Sociology* vol. 32, no. 4.

social relations and locate the political possibility of such transformation in the historicization and interrogation of deep-seated and largely unquestioned social practices and their underlying assumptions (1995: 82-6). What is more, without recognition that materiality is above all else *social*, both can only partially grasp their objects of analyses. However, both, too, can be associated with either *affirmative* or *transformative* political approaches, the former aimed at correction of inequities without disturbing the underlying social framework, the latter aimed at a thorough-going restructuring of the social order. But despite its contributions, Fraser's attempt to marry class analysis and deconstruction implicitly retains the identity/ class dichotomy it purports to subvert. Though she presents the two logics as compatible when seen through the frame of transformative political action, and calls on class-oriented thinkers to incorporate lessons from post-structuralists, Fraser continues to present redistribution (materialism) and recognition (post-structuralism) as fundamentally distinct, as approaches which begin with distinct logics, but whose analytical 'marriage' is politically useful at the present juncture (2000: 22-3). Fraser's vision, then, is one of alliance, and while that is in itself a step forward from past left cleavage, it fails to analyze politically the relationship between identity politics and class struggle, and does little to dramatically re-think either paradigm.

I would argue something further: that Marxian class theory can itself be understood as a theory of deconstruction, and that both Marxism and critical post-structuralism are incomplete in the absence of the other. That is, their methodological logics are as common as they are distinct: where post-

structuralists take apart cultural products to illustrate their contradictions, biases, and silences, so too does class analysis deconstruct economic arrangements to identify their social construction, concrete power implications, and potential rupture. The challenge, then, is to articulate the analytical and conceptual similarities of poststructuralist and class theories, to identify the concrete political struggles which contributed to the crisis of the left, and to suggest that a materially-grounded deconstruction and a relational understanding of class analysis are not so much distinct if compatible approaches as they are different trajectories of the same general analytic framework.

It is worth considering several themes often considered separate: the relational analysis of class in Marx, and its devolution into orthodoxy; the transition from Keynesianism to post-Keynesianism and the antagonisms of the period 1968-1973; the emergence of critical post-structuralism as an effort to understand new social movements given the poverty of much class theory, especially in the Leninist tradition; and the extensive methodological and theoretical overlap between non-deterministic or 'open' Marxisms and deconstructionist work. Though often abstracted from one another in contemporary analysis, these apparently distinct areas do, when viewed together, suggest an analytical deeper than that articulated by Fraser. While they are initially presented, then, as disparate discussions of (respectively) class theory, Keynesian crisis and collapse, and post-structuralist political thought, collectively they reveal that what is called for is less the forging of unity where there is none and more the re-thinking of class analysis outside the constraints of

Second and Third International orthodoxy, and the application of such analysis to the political struggles of the years since 1968. And what is called for, too, is a recognition that the exact ways analyses converge is secondary; more important is the real movement of struggle, the concrete antagonisms at play in the emerging world order, and the potential for articulation of new and profoundly subversive relationships.

The Politics of Class - orthodoxy and relational approaches to materialism:

Beginning with Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), contemporary debate on class analysis and deconstruction has asked if and how class analysis can be salvaged from traditional Marxist-Leninist reductionism and stagism. But here, already, the assumption is that Marxism is inherently rigid and economistic (DiFazzio, 1998: 148), an assumption of virtually all scholarship on the topic for the past fifteen years, and one which, I would suggest, is precisely the barrier to the debate's resolution.

Marxist class analysis is not an explanatory theory so much as a *method of inquiry*, a set of questions which together allow us to look beyond the apparently 'natural' organization of human life to the underlying processes which shape and re-shape social relations – processes which are historical and political, and whose daily reproduction is the effect of institutions, labouring practices, family structures, and language, to name only a few. In other words, Marxism is a methodology of deconstruction, and that is precisely its revolutionary potential. Where contemporary cultural analysts take apart

discourse to locate, name and subvert its assumptions and silences, they are, whether consciously or not, following in the intellectual footsteps of Marx, whose entire project was to take apart assumptions about human nature, economic development, democracy, and family in order to identify their constructedness, their antagonisms, their historical specificity. All this is not to suggest that Marxist class theory need not be interrogated critically, but rather that it must be interrogated with a *different set of questions* than those posed in the current debates; not, 'is there a continuing role for class analysis, in light of its reductionism', but rather, 'by what processes was a method of analytical deconstruction for explicitly subversive political purposes reconstituted so overwhelmingly as a rigid dogma which reinforced economism and political paralysis'? This latter question not only recognizes the important distinction between Marxist method and socialist orthodoxy, but also draws attention to the dangers of theory, and the ease with which anti-systemic analyses can be incorporated into the very knowledge-systems and institutions they seek to critique.

Here, however, the question of most significance is this: if Marxism can be understood as a deconstructive method, not only compatible but largely *congruous* with poststructuralist approaches, what might its analysis look like? For Harry Cleaver, drawing on feminist (Dalla Costa, 1973) and black liberationist (James, 1992) Marxisms, the term *working class* does not refer only to the industrial proletariat, but to all people upon whom work is imposed to produce and extend capital, a starting point which echoes Mario Tronti's insight that *the*

working class is composed of different kinds of people in different kinds of work and with different kinds of relationships in various geographic, historical, and political-economic contexts (Cleaver, 1993; Tronti, 1972). As a category shaped by its relationships with and struggles against capital, the term *working class* encompasses a multiplicity of diverse and autonomous groups in a wide range of times and places. Thus class analysis is about the shifting composition of class relationships, and both implies and requires an exploration of conflicts not only between capital and workers, but among workers themselves, i.e. among diverse sectors which may be defined at various times by gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, or any number of characteristics. Thus, too, class analysis does not simply describe the political movement of pre-existing, easily-defined class groups, but explores the antagonisms and solidarities which make and re-make class as a structural feature of social life, and the processes by which different groups of people *become* classed subjects. It is an analysis rooted in multiple systems of domination and resistance, and one which begins not from economic theory, but from the manufacture of history in all its murkiness.

Post-Marxism is absolutely correct that Marxism starts from the premise that class analysis is central to an understanding of the contemporary social order (Cunningham, 1987); what it misses, however, is that in Marx, no less than in the more recent thinkers so influential in post-structuralist work, class does not exist in a social vacuum, but emerges from and reconfigures a wide range of social relationships. From their very origins, class relations are gendered, racialized, sexualized, just as gender is classed, racialized and sexualized and

race is sexualized, classed and gendered; relationships of domination and resistance are *social* relations, produced and reproduced in the context of one another⁷⁴ (Hill-Collins, 1990; Fields, 1988).

The point of locating both within Marx and Marxism a class analysis that emphasizes relationship and deconstruction is, not, however, simply to overcome the chasm between Marxist and post-structuralist approaches; more importantly, it promises a deeper understanding of political-economic arrangements and emphasizes the *political* work of building subversive social movements. By situating class and capital as dynamic processes rather than identifiable 'things', the focus of analysis is *strategic*, i.e. it is set upon capital's attempt to impose its logic and to restructure human relationships as economic relationships, and the spaces and silences within which a *counter*-logic can be articulated. Rather than ignoring the multiplicity of struggles or subsuming various movements under one vanguard, such an approach demands that we recognize the diversity of popular mobilization as representative of a diversity of exploitations and oppressions which are neither traceable to nor autonomous from capital, but which are thoroughly intertwined with it. Finally, it recognizes, too, that diverse working class (and feminist, and queer, and anti-racist) movements can and do engage in struggle among themselves, and that such conflicts are frequently representative or constitutive of changes in the political compositions of both capital and the working class. Seen from this angle, 'new social movements' which confront diverse systems of domination are not proof of a subjectivity abstracted from

⁷⁴ For a recent discussion of how race operates through everyday 'invisible' relationships; and the dense interweaving of race and class in "revisionist racist narratives" of so-called reverse-racism, see Zamudio and Ríos, 2006.

capital or class, but are frequently "movements against the constraints of the capitalist social-factory - whether they have articulated their ideas as such or not" (Cleaver, 1993), and whether or not their struggles take on a patently 'economic' form.

That being said, it cannot be denied that such a relational and deconstructionist approach to class has been the exception rather than the rule (Kitching, 1993: 63). Without delving into a history of the Marxist left, it is apparent that debates and political struggles of the Second and Third Internationals marked a transition of Marxism from a method of historical analysis to a plan for alternative political-economic management, a shift which reached its peak in Stalinist orthodoxy (Cleaver, 2000: 31-6; Heinrich, 2005). Attempts to articulate a more dynamic class analysis, in the works of the Council Communists, the Johnston-Forest tendency, and the Italian *autonomia* movement, for example, were aggressively attacked and dismissed by official Communist Parties, on the one hand, and left-leaning Keynesians, on the other. The result was a division of class-oriented analysis and organization into two distinct trajectories: a Leninist version associated with a stagist view of history and an understanding of capitalism as simply the legal infrastructure of privately-owned capital, and a social democratic version for which class was defined in *distributive* terms, as a state of economic deprivation whose transcendence was largely compatible with the productive dynamics of market capitalism. But what the two shared in common was more substantial, and was to have profound implications for the political relevance of the left: both viewed socialism as a

future state to be achieved through the conquest of state power; both conceived socialism as an economic plan; both took *working class* to mean the urban industrial proletariat of the core capitalist states; and both abandoned class theory as a method for the analysis of political struggles and the deconstruction/historicization of economic 'law' (Cleaver, 1986; Dyer-Witheford, 1999). Though two distinct lefts emerged in the early years of the Cold War, then, they shared common premises of economism and rigidity; and it was this, the ossification of class analysis in both its revolutionary and evolutionary manifestations, that was to have such dramatic implications in 1968 and after.

As discussed previously, the crisis and collapse of Keynesianism was rooted in the combined rebellion of those excluded from the productivity deal - women, agricultural labourers, children - and the resistance of already-incorporated sectors (unionized workers, public employees, home-makers, and much of the so-called 'middle-class') to the advent of austerity as social policy. Forming the core of what are called 'new social movements', the common denominator of 'newness' was exclusion from traditional conceptions of *working class*, by representatives of both capital and the left, and hence a complete failure of existing class analyses to recognize any class content to the rising or appreciate its implications.

As post-structuralism suggests, then, the years since 1968 have been characterized by social tensions of a different kind, centred often around articulation of *belonging* or defense of *community* from state or corporate regulation. What is more, the social actors in these struggles have rarely been

trade unions or left political parties, but neighbourhood associations, mutual support networks, student movements, women's organizations, civil rights protests.

O'Connor (1973), Joppke (1987) and others have documented the role of social entitlement, or 'collective consumption', in Keynesian crisis; countless theorists of 'new social movements' have pointed out new tendencies in social struggle since that time (Buechler, 2000; Gorz, 2001; Johnston et al., 1994; McDonald, 2006; Offe, 1995; Touraine, 2002). But the question remains: are identity-based movements class-neutral? Or might a broadly-defined and relational class approach be more fruitful? The latter differs from the former in one key respect - it maintains an emphasis on class and analyses the various rebellions as examples of renewed class struggle, albeit by new actors on a new terrain. From this perspective, the crisis of Keynesianism is indeed rooted in the defense of community and collective consumption, and that is precisely *why* the continued relevance of class is so apparent. As students, professionals, public servants and housewives protested state cutbacks or increased surveillance of the community, they were in effect resisting the implementation of capital's latest strategy; likewise, ecological movements emerged on a mass scale at precisely the moment in which capital expanded its nuclear energy program and adopted neoliberal economic policies, what the Midnight Notes Collective refers to as 'the new enclosures' of the remaining commons - corporate attempts to capitalize on public space (1990); feminist movements devoted considerable attention to the unwaged status of domestic labour, arguing that home-work, no less than factory

labour, was productive of capital and part and parcel of the accumulation regime (Dalla Costa, 1973). In each instance, then, it is no great effort to read the class content of the new social movements or their struggles; on the contrary, what seems far-fetched is to explain a generalized revolt across countries, across sectors, a phenomenon such as occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s, without reference to capitalist crisis and the politics of class.

Theorizing post-1968 antagonisms - poststructuralism and the retreat from class:

The emergence of poststructuralism in the social sciences was, in many important ways, a result of the abandonment of Marxism's critical, deconstructionist edge; emerging from the struggles of new social actors, often said to be 'beyond' class identities (Offe, 1985; Dalton et al., 1990; Johnston et al., 1994; Pakulski, 1995; Pichardo, 1997) poststructuralism filled the gap when the Marxist-Leninist and Keynesian lefts were unable to account for (and often actively hostile to) the proliferation of multiple and diverse struggles which brought Keynesianism to crisis and collapse (see Foucault, 1978; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). In the attempt to make sense of widespread revolt by apparently 'class-neutral' actors, new analytical categories came to the fore - categories of identity and culture, which examined the social relationships underlying the virtually simultaneous explosion of post-colonial, student, ecological, feminist, gay and lesbian, and anti-racist movements.

Many of the so-called post-structuralists posed an explicitly non-materialist framework, espousing instead an idealist social theory beginning and ending with

language and symbol (i.e. Lacan, Lyotard, Barthes⁷⁵), and either openly nihilistic or simply resigned to the collapse of utopia (DiFazio, 1998). But a significant body of this work – often produced by veterans of the recent rebellions and former communists - notably Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari⁷⁶ - bore a striking resemblance to Marx's own methodology in that it retained a profound materialism in its focus upon deconstruction of cultural assumptions and apparently 'natural' divisions, such as those of gender, sexuality and race. And as with Marx, too, this stream of poststructuralist discourse emphasized social inequalities and social conflicts as *relational*, seeking within apparent opposites the construction and reconstruction of their 'Others' (Hall, 1996). Finally, and again consistent with Marx' method, the emerging body of work sought to identify the points of cleavage and contestation with a view to opening up the field of political struggle to identify new modes of organization and potential strategies not for reform of existing binarisms, but their transcendence.

This critical post-structuralism, then, re-opened and deepened a method of analysis which had been abandoned by the traditional left. In particular, it sought to interrogate not the specific manifestations of culturally- and materially-produced difference, but the very nature of difference itself - its role in producing and reproducing inequality, its presumed essentialism, its pervasive deployment in social interaction as gender, as race, as sexuality (hooks, 1993: 516-8; Namaste, 1994: 220-3). The production of binary systems of classification and

⁷⁵ See, for example, selections from several authors, most notably Lyotard and Derrida, in Lemert (1993).

⁷⁶ All three make direct references to materialism and Marxism in their work. See Foucault, 1984: 386; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 19; Guattari and Negri, 1990.

hierarchy was revealed to be a point of commonality across categories of identification and analysis which had previously been considered distinct. What is more, when traced historically, such binarisms increasingly were found to intersect and inform each other, not only in their present institutional arrangements, but from their very origins (Cleaver, 2000: 116). Thus autonomous political struggles facilitated new categories of analysis which themselves facilitated further political organization on the basis of those new theoretical and analytical considerations; postmodernism, poststructuralism, identity politics, difference: a significantly new and intensely political combination of theory and practice emerged in precisely those sites of tension ignored by the Marxist and Keynesian lefts. Post-Fordism, it seemed, was characterized by fundamentally new forms of conflict in which discursive and cultural marginalization had displaced economic inequality (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 2).

But just as orthodox Marxism had been unable to adequately grasp the ongoing processes of social conflict and the intersection of class with other cultural/ political relations, so too has much of post-structural theory obscured the continued play of class in social relations, not only of production, but of culture and identity as well (Fields, 1988; Miliband, 1989). Hennessy stresses this point in her evaluation of queer theory, and of Judith Butler's work in particular: though in its deconstruction of norms, its historicization of presumed 'natural' binarisms and its explicit recognition of identitarian and discursive struggles as *political* mark queer theory as "a version of materialism" (Hennessy, 1996: 223), its tendency to "entirely drop labor out of [its] analysis" obscures the centrality of

economic relations to materialism (1996: 225). That criticism is shared by others (Hall, 1991; McRobbie, 1991), who note that any investigation of the social construction of identity must consider the dense relationships between 'cultural' and 'economic' institutions if it is to meaningfully engage "the primary roots of exploitation and oppression rather than...the symptoms" (Ingraham, 1994: 216).

What all this suggests is not only that the old left's abandonment of deconstruction and relational analysis left it unable to grasp the totality of class relationships and their complex ties with articulations of gender, sexuality and race, but what is more, its narrow and deterministic definition of class categories made those tools less meaningful, and contributed to their easy dismissal by critical theorists who sought to retrieve and deepen deconstruction as a method of concrete relevance. The old left dismissed the new analysts as blind to economic realities, to the centrality of labour in political and cultural life; the new critics rejected the old as fossils, economic determinists whose tired formulas were incapable of grasping real social relations. And in fact, both were right. But, both, too, seemed to obscure the extent of their convergence, the degree to which critical post-structuralism was indebted to Marx' original historical method, and the degree to which the new deconstructionists were identifying cultural patterns and political divisions which both helped constitute and were partially constituted by relations of class (Bannerji, 1995: 34 and 38). It would take a deepening of political-economic crisis, and massive global discontent in the absence of a coherent counter-hegemonic political movement to bring these two complementary but apprehensive lefts together.

Class, Identity, and Political Struggles in an Era of Postmodern Capital:

Neoliberal restructuring, with its increasing commodification of relationships and communities, and its explicit attempt to reduce human interaction to market exchange, had by the 1990s generated massive popular resistance despite the ongoing crisis of the left. And the past two decades, too, have seen an explosion of attempts to synthesize class theory and poststructuralism, led in large part by post-colonial and black feminists (hooks, 1993; Bannerji, 1995; Hill-Collins, 1998), 'culturalist' Marxists, of whom Stuart Hall (1980; 1991; 1993; 1996) is the best known, and veterans of the 1968 struggles in Europe (Hardt and Negri, 1994); marginalized Marxist traditions are rediscovered (Cleaver, 2000), identitarian analyses of gender, sexuality and racialization are not only tolerated but seriously considered in increasing numbers of class analyses (Dunk, 1991; Clement and Myles, 1994); and political movements throughout the North are rediscovering alliance, solidarity, and vision.

Class struggle never went away. And as both activists and academics rediscover that fact, and rediscover, too, the analytical tools for making sense of class, the contributions of deconstruction will continue to be many and significant; in particular, post-structuralism's articulation of the relationship between *normal* and *Other* has forced a recognition of social inequality as *process*, as *relational* rather than fixed and stable. Such an approach demands more careful, nuanced,

and detailed analyses of power relations and highlights the dense and complex *inter-relationships* of distinct analytical categories: in other words, deconstructionism reminds class theory to historicize power relations and examine how concrete formations of class, gender, race and sexuality rely upon and configure one another in human interaction. Class emerges as a distinct relation in analytical terms, but one whose history is always and everywhere gendered, sexualized, racialized; by the same token, gender is sexualized, classed, and racialized, race is classed, sexualized and gendered, and sexuality is gendered, racialized and classed. And so the analytical distinction debated by Marxists and post-structuralists is just that - analytical; concrete relationships, the object of analysis and of political engagement, are altogether more complex (Hill Collins, 1998: 233-4).

To return to Fraser, then: can the dual approaches of class analysis and deconstruction be brought together in a politically meaningful way? Fraser, while clearly articulating a solid argument for a transformative politics of both recognition and redistribution, continues to emphasize an analytic disjuncture, with the result that deconstruction appears 'tacked on', as an antidote to orthodoxy, particularly in her follow-up work (2000: 27-8). Such is the case, too, with her respondents, among them Rorty against such a synthesis (2000), Butler increasingly for it (1998). But these academic debates over whether class analysis and post-structuralism 'can' be synthesized miss the main point; deconstruction is not an alien concept to class analysis, but one of its fundamental premises, whose absence in orthodox Marxism-Leninism derives

from the order and economism of the Soviet state project rather than from the method itself. The question, then, is not *whether* the two can be analytically married, but how we can articulate their interconnection in a meaningful way at the current political-economic juncture.

READING MARX AND TAKING LEAPS

I HAD FIRST READ MARX IN 1988, AS I DISCOVERED A THREE VOLUME COLLECTION IN A HARARE BOOKSTORE. FOR YEARS I STRUGGLED TO FIND IT INTERESTING – I WAS FAIRLY SURE I GRASPED THE BASICS, I WAS FAIRLY SURE I WAS A BELIEVER, BUT I FELT DISTINCTLY INADEQUATE WHEN I TRIED TO EXPLAIN THE POLITICS TO FRIENDS AND CLASSMATES THE WAY THE BOOKS DID – BY RECITATION OF THE EQUATIONS IN *CAPITAL*.

THEN IN 1995 I LEARNED TO READ *CAPITAL* IN A DIFFERENT WAY, STARTING AT THE END. I DON'T REMEMBER WHO RECOMMENDED IT BUT I'LL NEVER FORGET THE POINT - "IT'S THE ONLY WAY IT MAKES SENSE, AND THE ONLY WAY TO GET THROUGH IT". I BEGAN TO READ, STARTING WITH THE CHAPTER ON PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION, AND MOVING TO THE ECONOMIC THEORY ONLY AFTER THOROUGHLY ABSORBING MYSELF IN THE HISTORY. THE RESULT WAS A MARX I'D NEVER READ BEFORE; A MARX I'D NEVER BEEN TAUGHT BEFORE; AND IT WAS ALIVE. AGAINST THE SCHOLARLY MARX, AGAINST THE PHILOSOPHICAL MARX, AGAINST THE ECONOMIC MARX, AGAINST THE ENDLESS DEBATES ABOUT HEGEL - HERE WAS A TEXT ABOUT THEFT AND MURDER, ABOUT CONQUEST AND RESISTANCE, ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND STRUGGLES, ABOUT HOPE. HERE WAS A TEXT ABOUT THE MAKING OF WORK, THE MAKING OF WORKERS, AND AN ALWAYS-ALREADY COMMUNISM WHICH HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH STATEHOOD AND ECONOMIC POLICY, AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH DESIRE, WITH THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZING AND THE ACT OF RESISTANCE, WITH DEFENDING AND ENLARGING SPACES OF NON-WORK. HERE WAS A TEXT WITH BLOOD AND DIRT ON ITS HANDS, A TEXT NOT ABOUT MUDSLINGING BETWEEN EUROCOMMUNISTS,

TROTSKYISTS AND STALINISTS, BUT WHICH INSTEAD DREW LINES OF RELATIONSHIP FROM CONQUEST TO SLAVING TO ENCLOSURE TO FACTORY TO SURVEILLANCE AND OPENING THE DOOR TO FOUCAULT AND THE PANOPTICON. AND ALWAYS RELATIONSHIPS OF RESISTANCE AND DESIRE.

AND SO I WAS HOSTING A READING-GROUP ON *CAPITAL* WITH FRIENDS ONE NIGHT, SIPPING WINE AND TALKING POLITICS AND MARX AND POST-STRUCTURALISM, WHEN MY PARTNER, JO – SHE EXPLORING THE POLITICS AND DESIRE OF GENDER-PLAY AND QUEERDOM – TOOK MY HAND AND LED ME ALONG THOSE PATHS OF RELATIONSHIP AND DESIRE. AND ME, UP TO THIS MOMENT PRUDISH AND PURITANICAL AND NODDING MY ASSENT TO THE CATHOLIC VOICES IN MY HEAD SCREAMING MONOGAMY MONOGAMY MONOGAMY - I WAS TERRIFIED AND EXCITED, AND I SQUEEZED JO'S HAND AND JUMPED WITH HER INTO THIS OTHER WORLD OF SEX AND DRAG AND IDENTITY AND PLAY AND SMUT AND, YES, THEORY.

FAST FORWARD SEVERAL MONTHS AND I'M READING PAT CALIFIA ON PUBLIC SEX, SHANNON BELL ON BAKHTIN AND WHORING, CAROL QUEEN ON PEEPSHOWS AND POMOSEXUALITY. I'M LEARNING HOW TO SAY FUCK AND MEAN IT. I'M LEARNING THAT LIVES ARE STRANDS OF RELATIONSHIP, MESSY AND BROKEN AND TANGLED, AND THAT THE LIVING IS IN THE NEGOTIATION OF THAT MAZE. EVERY CONVERSATION, EVERY TOUCH, EVERY MOMENT OF DESIRE OR JEALOUSY – I'M LEARNING THIS IS THE STUFF RELATIONSHIP IS MADE OF. AND I'M THINKING ITS NOT SO DIFFERENT WHETHER FUCKING OR WORKING OR ORGANIZING A CUBA-SOLIDARITY RALLY.

'Race riots' in the U.S.

The Black movement was the first section of the class to massively take its autonomy from these organizations, and to break away from the containment of the struggle only in the factory. When Black workers burn the centre of a city, however, White Left eyes, especially if they are trade union eyes, see race, not class.

Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class*
[http:// www.ainfos.ca/05/apr/ainfos00374.html](http://www.ainfos.ca/05/apr/ainfos00374.html)

Sex Work in Greece

Prostitutes in Athens called a strike and took to the streets on Monday to protest the city's crackdown on registered brothels. "Just the lights will stay on. Black kerchiefs will hang outside the houses," Elisa Kolovou, spokeswoman for the prostitutes' union KEGE, told AFP.

AFP, August 4, 2003

And Everywhere Things Unseen...

There is rising a new movement in the world. It is bigger than the movement of the 1960s. Yet it is barely seen by the experts and analysts. They look only at the behavior of institutions and politicians, not the underlying forces that eventually burst into visibility.

The first strand of this new movement is the global opposition to the war in Iraq and to an American empire. One year ago this month, when over 100,000 demonstrators hit the streets in Washington DC, the NY Times reported that surprisingly few attended the anti-war march... National Public Radio repeated the story. How could they not see the 100,000? Apparently because such protests were not supposed to happen anymore...[By February] 10 million people were demonstrating globally; two million in Rome, one million in London, 200,000 in Montreal in 20-degrees-below weather - even a brave few in McMurdo Station in Antarctica.

The second strand is the global justice movement, which began with the Zapatistas on the day NAFTA took effect, then surfaced in Seattle in 1999. Those were called isolated events. Then came Genoa, Quebec City, Quito, Cancun, the world social forums in Porto Allegre. Far from isolated events, these were the historic battlegrounds of a new history being born.

Tom Hayden, *Evidence of Things Unseen*
<http://www.zmag.org>

Chapter 9

From Italy's Hot Summer to Queer Theory ⁷⁷:

mapping the tributaries for a process-based materialism

By the 1980s, it was clear that post-structuralism and the so-called new social movements had thrown down the gauntlet, and that traditional working class organizations were entirely unprepared either ideologically or politically. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc the demise of the left seemed complete – its socialism morally bankrupt, its labour unions bloated and paralyzed, its self-definition clearly inadequate for a world beyond Fordist mass-production, beyond strict divisions of colonizers and colonized, and beyond the clever class collaboration envisioned by Keynes. For over a decade Marx was gone, as ideologists the world over apologized for their short-sightedness, condemned the old boy for misleading them, and stepped forth with a new set of books that decried any order, any class struggle, indeed any class⁷⁸. But while the Marxists jumped ship, other voices began to be heard from precisely those quarters long-deemed 'morally bankrupt' and 'dangerous' by the vanguard – queers and anarchists and queer anarchists were about to step into the materialist void, with some important insights culled from years on the margins of everyone's 'us'.

⁷⁷ Portions of this chapter have been previously published in *Rethinking Marxism* vol. 14, no. 2 (2002).

⁷⁸ Those former Marxists who sought to distance themselves from class theory are many. In particular see the previously-discussed *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), as well as Gorz, 2001, and Castaneda, 1993. , For more detail, see Ellen Meiksins Wood *The Retreat from Class* (1995).

Autonomía – the first tributary:

First out of the docks were the anarchists and left-communists so long denounced by the self-proclaimed 'legitimate' left. Well-suited to a recovery from the collapse of command socialism precisely because that socialism had never formed part of its political heritage, a number of long-neglected traditions began to coalesce as a compatible but by no means homogenous school of their own, labeled everything from autonomism to libertarian communism to anarcho-Marxism to just plain anti-capitalism. Explicitly seeking to pull together a non-reductionist and *relational* class analysis, this body of work celebrated eclecticism, drawing on post-structuralism, feminism, anti-racism, and queer theory to develop a class analysis without the determinism of so much orthodoxy. Among the best-known of such attempts in recent years is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, a manifesto which – for all its gaps, hyperboles and impenetrable word-games - has engaged socialists of all stripe, but which is itself the product of a tradition long marginalized by socialists and social-democrats alike: a tradition loosely referred to as *autonomist* Marxism, with its roots in the struggles of workers, students, and women in 1960s and 1970s Italy.

Autonomía is less a school than a tradition, traceable through a diverse cast of scholars and strugglers including the Italian workerist movement, the Johnson-Forest tendency of CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya, the Council Communists, the Wobblies and other anarcho-syndicalists and assorted 'left communists'. Emerging on the heels of and in explicit reference to what has been

called the 'hot summer' of 1969 – months that witnessed unprecedented factory takeovers, armed actions, bombings and a tremendous outpouring of anarchist and communist debate - it sits at the juncture of Marxism and anarchism, and in many incarnations is interwoven with poststructuralism. But its most basic characteristic is its emphasis on a three-part *autonomy*, an analytical focus which distinguishes the tradition from more orthodox Marxism-Leninisms⁷⁹.

- (a) the autonomy of workers from capital. I.e. workers do not simply react to the machinations of capital; rather, the working class is an active and creative subject both capable of and constantly engaged in work, in resistance, and in shaping and re-shaping social relations.
- (b) the autonomy of workers from their officially-recognized representatives (Party and union). I.e. the struggles of workers are neither defined by nor subsumed within the activities of any 'vanguard' or 'representative' organization; while there may certainly be a relationship between class dynamics in the social body and the behaviour of official working class organizations, it is the real struggles of working people that class analysis must identify, and these struggles can and are frequently waged both outside of and actively against organizations claiming to represent working class interests

⁷⁹ Some would suggest that this is understating it; Witheford (1994) notes that autonomism's affirmation of the power of workers has been considered by some a 'Copernican inversion' of everything post-World War II Marxism represented.

- 3) the autonomy of various sectors of the class from one another. I.e. the term 'class' does not refer to homogenous, easily identifiable and permanent groups, but to a relationship between those who command labour and those whose labour is commanded. Those relationships are complex, multifaceted, and ever-shifting. What is more, 'the working class' is composed through existing and ever-evolving relationships of power, and cannot be abstracted from other social processes of gendering, racialization, sexualization and so on. That being understood, it becomes apparent not only that various groups of workers might struggle and organize in different ways, but that they also may come into conflict with and struggle against one another⁸⁰. There can be no clear line, then, to identify what is and what is not 'class struggle'; the starting point of class analysis, rather, must be the complex and diverse ways in which people struggle in their work, their communities, and their relationships.

A relatively simple starting point, this triple autonomy is what holds together an otherwise diverse tradition (Day, 2005; Dyer-Witheford, 1999: 65-69); there are certain texts, however, which have been particularly important for their contribution of the conceptual and analytic categories *mass worker*, *social*

⁸⁰ A particularly interesting example is the fact that Dalla Costa and others broke from the formal 'autonomists' in the 1970s, citing a continuing failure to adequately account for gender in much autonomist work (Day, 1995). This has not, however, had any impact on their inclusion in the broadly-defined autonomist tradition today, nor the continuing impact of their work upon that tradition. As noted, while *autonomia* at one point referred to a specific network of Italian communists, today it references a more general network.

capital, refusal, and autonomy, and which can provide important insights into the rethinking of class theory beyond Leninism.

Dalla Costa, James and James – the class theory of 'the classless'

Previously Mariarosa Dalla Costa made an appearance as a major contributor to the re-thinking of class, and particularly of women's class credentials as those primarily responsible for the reproduction of the working class. Her contribution, however, is significant for another reason as well – and enters the Italian left through the striking similarities between her work and that of her comrade Selma James, and the prolific C.L.R. James, writing partner of Raya Dunayevskaya and comrade turned critic of Leon Trotsky. In this iteration, Dalla Costa's housewife is important for what she says about not only the possibility but the absolute necessity of separate and autonomous struggles within and among different groups of workers. For Dalla Costa, feminist struggles are neither before, beside, or behind class struggles – rather they *are* class struggles, and a left which fails to recognize this will prove entirely incapable of seeing the deep and tangled roots of class in daily life.

It was a point that echoed and was echoed in the writings of the two Jameses. C.L.R. had broken with Trotsky some years earlier over a similar problem – the inability and unwillingness of the latter to see anti-colonial struggles and those of black Americans as anything other than 'civil rights' matters, bourgeois in scope though perhaps worthy of some marginal support. For James, on the contrary, the primary terrain of the class struggle at the time (the 1950s to early 1960s) was struggle for national liberation in the colonies and

black nationalism in the U.S. (James, 1939). Selma James was even more direct, arguing that "the working class movement is something other than the left has ever envisioned it to be" (James, 1973). Like Dalla Costa, she challenged the notion of a single 'working class interest' and the related concept of the vanguard, articulating instead an interweaving of race/ gender/ class even in the earliest formation of the proletariat, such that the distinctions between the three arose more from the location of the see-er rather than any fundamental difference between them. In other words, "relations of the sexes, races, nations and generations are, precisely, particularized forms of class relations" (James, 1973). Any notion of class purity, then, is an illusion – struggles of Black workers against their unions, withdrawal of Black nationalists and anti-colonialists and feminists from the official Communist Parties – these were not moments of schism or brief interludes from the class struggle – they *were* the class struggle.

In most of Europe, in white North America, and everywhere in the official Soviet-allied and Trotskyist movements James and James were unwelcome voices. In the Caribbean and Africa, however, they found resonance with pan-Africanists such as George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah (Padmore, 1971). And in Italy, through Dalla Costa and others, they struck a significant chord in the Communist Party left as early as the mid-1970s, and played a central role in the articulation of the three-part autonomy from which the *autonomía* movement takes its name – that is, the recognized autonomy of working class struggles from capital, from the vanguard organizations, and of sectors of the class from one another. The result was a complete break with the idea of the vanguard, and

a class theory which sought a pluralization not in moderation of demands and appeal to whatever is meant by 'middle class', but in a deepening and extension of critique, in 'one, two, many class struggles'. And it is a chord that would be echoed throughout the world on the heels of post-structuralism a decade later. If Leninists could not keep up, so much the worse for them. Class, gender, race, and other structural relationships required no recognition by the official left to be real, meaningful, and revolutionary.

Mario Tronti and the Strategy of Refusal

While Dalla Costa and other Italian feminists such as Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) delved deeply into the analysis of reproduction as production, others within the Italian Communist Party (CPI) focused their analytical lenses elsewhere. For Mario Tronti, the question was: if capital is a *relation of work* and extends itself across ever greater spheres of human life, even outside of the factory and into the community, what are the implications for our vision of somewhere-else-than capitalism and our strategies to achieve that somewhere-else. In his "The Strategy of Refusal" Tronti begins from the premise that communism can only be the *negation* of the capital relation – and that implies a negation of participation in either capital's governance or its accumulation. Tronti develops the idea of revolution as *refusal*, and working class organization as the negation of capitalist development. If capital is the provider of *labour* i.e. the relation of work - and the working class, in contrast, the provider of *capital* – i.e. the creative force in production - then workers are an always-constituted class (though not always constituted the same way, and the specific contours of that class are continually

being formed and re-formed) and capitalists are ultimately mere organizers, who only form a class in their own right through the conquest of state power and the use of/ threat of the state monopoly on violence to enforce that management. Capital's seizure of the state, in other words, illustrates its fundamentally and necessarily *coercive* substance – that is, capitalist power is not itself creative, and only takes form as domination of the society as a whole.

Creative power, by contrast, is exclusively the terrain of workers though through the threat of force, i.e. the state, it is harnessed to capitalist organization. Tronti argues that Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy has tended to posit capital's power as prior and primary, with serious consequences for class struggle: first, workers' organizations have sought to copy capital's methods, i.e. seizure of state power in the case of political parties, and industrial management in the case of trade unions; second, they have conceived of socialism as an alternative system of production and political administration. In both cases, the result is a working class strategy limited to altering the mechanisms of command without transcending the class relation itself. Tronti and subsequent autonomists seek to correct this imbalance by inverting the lens, and emphasizing instead a working class that is analytically, politically, and even historically prior to capital. The political implication? That if the working class is prior to capital, and the state is the constitution of a social power which organizes, and is always foreign to, the working class, then any working class state project must be a fiction. Further, if capital is above all a system for imposing labour and extracting value, then

socialism as an alternative economic project cannot be the transcendence of capital, but only its re-organization.

The emphasis of working class priority has significant analytic shortcomings, particularly in that it ignores the dialectical relationship of class, i.e. the notion of workers and capital as analytically and historically intertwined, albeit in struggle. That said, it is a useful rhetorical counter to economistic Marxisms, and poses a political challenge as well, for the upshot of Tronti's analysis is straightforward *refusal*. Revolution can only be a negative struggle, a rejection of the state, of the contract, and of *work* - a refusal to participate in political-economic projects to manage industry or to manage populations. Anything less remains an alternative method of organizing workers, a differently-structured command which ultimately leaves intact the class relation. It is not a highly-nuanced formulation; but its implication is an important one - that the working class is a social tension of resistance, not of order, and that the key to analyzing the play of class therefore is always to look to the locations of refusal and disorder rather than the policy-books or political strategies of organizations which claim an ability to translate that tension into an alternative order.

Mass Worker and Social Capital in Guido Baldi:

If *refusal* is the stuff revolution is made of, however, a fundamental question becomes *how* workers can collectively organize that refusal; or, how can we understand the history of working class organization and struggle in a way which addresses its political ability to refuse and the impact of its collective strategies on either the strengthening or weakening of refusal. Guido Baldi's "Theses on

Mass Worker and Social Capital" (1972), yet another central text of the rich debate that was *autonomía* provides some clues, examining the development of class struggles between 1900 and 1933, and showing how these represent a political recomposition of classes and transformation of the substance and terrain of class struggle.

Baldi (a pseudonym adopted by several activists in the broadsheets of the day) notes that the early 1900s were marked by extensive struggles internationally; the political movement of the working class emerged as a global phenomenon culminating in the Bolshevik Revolution and the formation of organizations for self-management of production (particularly vanguard parties and factory councils). The management-orientation of workers' organization at this point represents two distinct dynamics of the time: a progression of class struggles from distributional demands to competition over the production process itself, and the development of an organizational model based on management by skilled workers which excluded other sectors of the working class and articulated a struggle not against capital, but against *capitalists*.

Such was the status of the political composition of the working class on the eve of Taylorism, which for its part marked an offensive by capital against the skilled worker. Posited in its place was the *mass worker*, in capital's strategy intended not as a creative agent but an appendage of the machine. Yet the attempt to transform the worker into a homogenous and interchangeable cog had its own repercussions - downward pressure on wages reduced demand while the subordination of labour to the machine increased productivity. The result?

Heightened management within the factory was accompanied by chaos in the social factory.

As this crisis culminated in the Depression of the 1920s and 1930s, Keynesian strategy won recruits given its promise to harness workers' demands (consumption) to capital's expansion. The state emerged as economic plan, organized labor as the primary vehicle for the political management of class struggle. The resulting 'deal' took shape not only within the factory, then, but in the social world at large - capital moved outside of the factory to invest society as a whole - state as economy, economy as state. The implications for class struggle were far-reaching, on both sides of the relation - individual capitalists were subordinated to social capital, social relations were densely and directly interwoven with economic production, and the mass worker extended beyond the factory gate to become the citizen - or perhaps vice versa. The worker dissolves into the people - class struggle is nowhere precisely because it is everywhere.

The Class Struggle Analysis:

Baldi had stressed the political autonomy of workers' struggles vis a vis capitalist managerial strategies. Taking this a step further, Mario Tronti explored the political composition of the working class and the importance of beginning with concrete strategies of workers in "Workers and Capital" (1972b), his strategic reading of twentieth century U.S. and Western European working class history.

Tronti suggests the most common approach to the study of workers' struggles can be conceived as a *chronological* one, i.e. one which traces series of events involving workers and workers' organizations with a view to determining

what occurred and positing an interpretation. But there is also another approach, he suggests, and one which would be a rich source of strategic analysis for those who sought a class analysis untied to the major left political parties and trade unions: the *political class* approach.

A political class analysis focuses not upon sequences of events, but significant moments in strategy, organization and planning which have implications for the balance of class forces and future strategy. For example, a chronological approach would outline the growth of the US union movement in the years preceding World War II, the evolution of state industrial policy, and then seek an explanation. A *political* approach would examine (within the context of an historical understanding of workers' struggles in the period) the theoretical and analytical work of pro-capitalist scholars in the years before the New Deal with a view to identifying how capital's high priests interpreted the challenges of the time and how they articulated strategy; it would then be possible to re-read such texts from a working class perspective, mindful of capitalist strategy and with a view to developing working class strategy. Through such an approach it becomes possible to read the emergence of post-war industrial policy not simply as a state's response to certain events, but as a *planned, strategic* response of capital collectively to the challenge of labour. And only on the basis of *that* understanding can we begin to make sense of the post-war era in terms that are politically-meaningful and which contribute to the development of immediate strategy while bearing in mind the specific historical moment and how it came to be.

Having thus articulated his project, Tronti examines key historical moments in European and US class struggles since Marx. The first era is represented by late nineteenth century Britain, but is *not* represented by those figures most commonly referred to, such as the Fabians. Rather, what is internationally significant about this political moment is the emergence of a new union ideology among rank and file workers, one which rejected specialized unions and mutual-aid networks in favour of mass action and solidarity based on class. The second era, that of social-democracy, is significant not so much for the turn of the German SPD to Bernsteinism, but for a more basic re-configuration of struggle which Bernstein represented no more and no less than Lenin; the expansion of struggle to an explicitly political terrain, and the recognition that the state, no less than capital, must become a terrain of struggle. The third major development, for Tronti, can be traced to the US experience of 1933-1947, a period during which the number and duration of strikes exploded, membership in working class organizations soared, and an entirely new capitalist strategy emerged in both the theory of Keynes and the policy of Roosevelt - the strategy of capitalist planning and incorporation of class struggles into the drive for accumulation. As in the earlier examples, the era of the New Deal is politically significant not for its specific events, but because it hearkened both a dramatically new strategy on the part of capital, and hence a major restructuring of the world system, and because it, too, illustrates the rise of a new form of working class organization - the formalized mass union - to coordinate class struggle in the context of that emerging order.

What all the above suggests, then, is that studies of class struggle as chronology have a limited usefulness; what is more important is the analysis of strategy, both capitalist and working class, and the attempt to identify how cycles of struggle engender new capitalist strategies, which in turn re-compose the working class in new ways, which in turn engender new forms of organization and struggle among the now-'changed' working class. In other words, for Tronti – and here is the lasting significance – *the working class* is not static, not always and everywhere defined in the same terms or comprised of the same networks of people in the same types of relationships. That is, though something called the working class may be said to objectively exist, the status of individuals, groups, parties, and unions shift with new strategies. A working class, perhaps; but whose and whys and to what ends can never be taken for granted.

Lessons from Italy:

The Italian *autonomía* movement has been largely overlooked by a left split into politically-opposed yet frequently analytically-congruous Leninist and social-democratic camps. A generation into the beast called post-Fordism/ post-Keynesianism/ post-industrialism/ neo-liberalism/ globalization, however, activists and analysts are re-discovering approaches long-forgotten. The challenges of post-structuralism to orthodox Marxism have further facilitated this process, forcing many to re-emphasize a relationship-oriented *critical method* of class analysis over mere rhetorical deployment. And in the midst of this, the methods, concepts, and even names associated with *autonomía* are re-emerging, too. Autonomedia and the University of Minnesota Press are both releasing

autonomist or autonomist-inspired texts new and old. Harry Cleaver's *Reading Capital Politically* has been re-issued by anarchist presses. Antonio Negri's writings and political struggles are again visible in the radical intellectual news, and are generating widespread commentary among Marxists of all stripe, particularly since the publication of his and Michael Hardt's *Empire* and *Multitude*. C.L.R. James, one of the main sources of inspiration within this tradition, is the subject of a significant intellectual and political come-back, his writings on autonomy, class struggle, anti-racism and culture being re-issued on a regular basis and providing the source of much discussion and debate. In sum, the moral and political bankruptcy of socialism's Stalinist and social-democratic trajectories has spawned a rediscovery of much-maligned and long-neglected approaches to class analysis and organization – approaches which are capable of bridging the anarchist/ communist/ poststructuralist divides and drawing together diverse movements and forms of struggle in a common yet in no way hierarchical network of subversions. And within that process, some of the concepts and methods central to the autonomist approach can provide a useful starting point – not as a new theoretical model, not as a *What Is To Be Done*-manual for organization-building, but as a set of questions which can begin, and yet *only* begin, to deepen the relevance of class analysis not as all-explanatory theory or map to the stars, but as the strategic study of the real political movement of class struggle.

At least since the 1930s, class analysis has been synonymous with two approaches – social-democratic and command socialist – which *both* centered

upon a narrow conception of 'the working class' and which both sought the conquest of state power and re-organization of industrial management. There is, however, another tradition of class analysis, which, though long marginalized and rife with its own internal debates, contains, even if only implicitly, a few core principles that are critical components of any contemporary anti-capitalism:

- (a) the recognition that political relations of class, gender, race, and sexuality are so densely interwoven that none can be adequately grasped, either conceptually or politically, without reference to their intersection and continuous re-configuration;
- (b) flowing from the above, a recognition that 'the working class' does not exist as a timeless and ahistorical subject, but is continually shaped and re-shaped through the social, political, economic and cultural relations;
- (c) and as follows from the above, a recognition that the form and strategy of class politics must continually undergo crisis and change as the compositions of the working class and capital shift; that is, organizational forms and political strategies emerge from specific historical and relational contexts, and must be abandoned or drastically reconfigured as those contexts change.

Though these may seem relatively straightforward, they are fundamentally at odds with the assumptions that continue to govern much class theory and class organization – assumptions, for example, that the state can be conquered, that

industry ("the economy", "growth", "development") can be made class-neutral, that a single primary oppression can and must be identified, that struggle among various sectors of the working class is inherently damaging, that "the working class" means the same thing in all times and all places, and to all people. The texts of the Italian *autonomia* tradition intimate that it may yet be possible to challenge these basic assumptions of the left without abandoning Marx for a dematerialized discourse analysis and without submitting intellectually or politically to the notion that 'there is no alternative'.

Queer Theory and Class Struggle – the second tributary

Emerging in social theory from its origins in cultural studies and discourse analysis, the body of work loosely gathered under the label *queer theory* has introduced substantial challenges not only to the heteronormativity of most social theory, but also to the ways analyses of inequality in general have implicitly reproduced essentialist notions of identity and consciousness, and thus constructed limits to their own subversive potential.

Queer theory is less a homogeneous school of thought than a dialogue across disciplines which seeks to multiply the questions asked by social analysis. Emerging from more general trends toward deconstruction associated with poststructuralist thought, it takes as its starting point the social construction of apparently-fixed identities, the reliance of such identities on presumed binary oppositions of difference which inhere to them, and the always *unstable*, always *partial* hegemonies of 'the normal' in real human life. In Seidman's words,

identities are always multiple or at best composites,

with an infinite number of ways in which "identity components" (...) can intersect or combine. Any specific identity construction, moreover, is arbitrary, unstable, and exclusionary (Seidman, 1994: 173).

Not only do constructions of identity always entail constructions of their opposite, then, but, because those opposites are ideal-typical poles, they also produce unintended gaps on the continuum between them. And it is not so much in the recognition or affirmation of the 'Other' as here, on the multiple and shifting terrain between identities (i.e. the in-betweens of gender, race and sexuality), that the potential lies for subverting essentialism altogether (Butler, 1990; Seidman, 1994: 173). This, then, is also where the importance of queer theory lies - not so much in the particulars of its diverse analyses of discourse, culture, theory, or law, but in its insistence upon the *subversion* of apparently-dichotomous relationships rather than simply their inversion or recognition (Namaste, 1994: 230).

Such an analytic focus has significant implications for our understanding of, and political engagement with, relations of domination and resistance, including class relations. In fact, I would suggest that queer theory does for our understanding of identity struggle what Marx did for our understanding of economic struggle - historicizing its assumptions, identifying its subversions, articulating its always-already existing potentials. And in doing these, it provides an opportunity to engage the relations of capital and class not as a set of immediately conquerable institutions but as a complex of ongoing relationships which is continually challenged, reconfigured and reinforced through the daily interactions of individuals and collectives (Namaste, 1994: 224). How it does this,

and the implications of that strategy for political class struggle, can be seen in the questions queer theory asks of more traditional approaches to gender inequality and heteronormativity, and the alternative political approaches those questions engender.

Building on its roots in critical post-structuralism, queer theory interrogates not only the marginalized 'Others' of social norms, but the *dynamic* and ever-shifting relationship between the poles; that is, rather than emphasizing the invisibility of women in patriarchy or of gays and lesbians in heteronormativity, the role those Others play is examined as always-already interior to the normal (Namaste, 1994: 222). This is much more than a philosophical or discursive exercise, as too many Marxists are quick to assert - stressing the *relational* puts front and centre the questions of interaction, of contestation, and of resistance. It implies that the binarisms upon which so much of identity is constructed cannot be pre-existing, that neither pole in a dichotomy can be primary or natural, and that the formation, location, and interaction of such 'opposites' are the very substance of their continued reproduction. And if that is the case, resistance and alternatives become that much easier to locate as well, for three reasons: because the recognition of identity as plural opens space for subversion which can potentially include distinct and even apparently antagonistic groups; because the emphasis on constructedness reveals that so-called normative identities (i.e. white, heterosexual, middle class) are no less unstable and partial than marginal ones, despite the significant privilege attached to them; and because antagonism can never be rooted in immutable characteristics but must always and

everywhere be located in existing relationships and the political strategies people employ to negotiate and renegotiate those relationships (Namaste, 1994: 225).

All of this puts queer theory in marked contrast to more traditional approaches to social inequality, even those which sought radical political change. For example, previous theories of feminist and sexual liberation often tended to reproduce rather than subvert essentialism and binarism by opposing a unitary victimized subject to a hegemonic norm, whether defined as male, heterosexual, or both. This can be seen in a wide range of politically-motivated, even 'revolutionary' work, from radical feminism's celebration of womanhood and privileging of lesbianism and Dworkin and MacKinnon's construction of an all-encompassing, inherently-oppressive male sexuality to Kristeva and Wittig's searches for origins and even Wilkinson and Kitzinger's arguments for political and identitarian unity in gay liberation struggles (Butler, 1990; Bell, 1994; Ingraham, 1994: 213-5; Parker, 1998: 226; Seidman, 1994: 170; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1994). In each case, patriarchy and heterosexuality remain constructed as universal and as intact; even where their naturally-occurring status is called into question, they are seen as constructed upon real biological difference or imperative. Thus the hegemony of *heterogender* (Ingraham, 1994: 204) is taken as a pre-existing fact, rather than a recurrent tension, and the only possibilities for resistance are formal equality within existing parameters or inversion (but continued maintenance) of the hierarchy.

By critiquing the tendency of much feminist and gay liberationist work to reproduce binarism, queer theory attempts to accomplish a re-thinking akin to

that brought on by post-colonial and black feminist thought in regard to assumed norms of whiteness - to promote a politically-meaningful solidarity not on the basis of inherent *sameness*, but of *constructed difference*, not on the assumption of permanent, fixed identities but on *fluid, partial* and *contingent* notions of selfhood and alliance which acknowledge multiple intersecting relationships⁸¹. Such a perspective may at first glance appear contradictory to the formation of political class solidarity, in that it de-emphasizes points of commonality; but on deeper examination, what appears is not a rejection of solidarity, but a different conception of it. The point of commonality is not a universal sameness of oppression, not an unbesmirched essence buried beneath learned behaviour, but the fact that we *all* share the experience of living with hierarchy-based identities, that we *all* experience only partial and unstable adjustment to identitarian regulations, albeit in different, and even contradictory, ways (see, for example, Wright, 1997), and that *all* identities are at best incomplete, complex, and transitory. The resultant solidarity, then, is not one of a taken-for-granted unity or a presumed shared utopia, but rather a *strategic* solidarity which sees the sexual/ gender/ race/ class landscape itself, rather than any identifiable position on that landscape, as the target. This, in turn, opens space for a plurality of resistances which can be seen not as competing, but as mutually supporting, and provides for the possibility of alliance across sectoral divides.

⁸¹ This is discussed at length in Laclau and Mouffe's seminal work, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). But while they conclude that the recognition of identity as partial and unstable requires a retreat from class, a more fruitful analysis extends those characteristics of identity to class itself, emphasizing the intersection and blurring of identity/ class as relationships which continually reconfigure and are reconfigured by one another.

All of this presupposes a very different approach to political struggle than we have been accustomed to. The broadly-defined left - be it feminist, Marxist, gay liberationist, or nationalist - has tended to ground its political strategies and end goals in terms of an easily-identifiable opponent: the class war rages between capitalists and workers; the feminist struggle between men and women; the sexual liberation struggle between straights and gays and lesbians; the anti-racist struggle between racists and non-racists, as though real human relationships ever correspond neatly to such ideal-typical poles. And while such oppositional organizing offered a means of establishing political community and articulating the value of alternative knowledges and alternative ways of living, in each case what was taken for the enemy was an embodied *product* of the system rather than the relational system itself⁸². That is, the relation *capital* produces capitalists and workers, as though these were ahistoric, unchanging and easily-identified categories; the gender system produces men and women, as though individuals were necessarily wholly or permanently one or the other; the racialization process produces whites and blacks, as though these were somehow natural and timeless categories, rather than shorthand for a vast and ever-growing range of miscegenations and racial and cultural identities. In each case, however, these presumed dichotomies are, in real human relationships, only-ever partial, can only be defined contextually, and are subject to constant re-definition. What needs to be analyzed and targeted politically, then, is not the individuals associated with various positions within such relational systems, but

⁸² The implications of equating the embodied product "capitalist" with the relation "capital" are well-articulated in I. Meszaros' *Beyond Capital* (1995).

the systems themselves - individuals are socially located not due to any essential characteristic which inheres to them, but due to their positioning within relationships and their roles in either reinforcing or subverting relations of domination. Rather than a retreat from conflict, then, the emphasis on relationships and systems helps to focus the object of struggle more clearly, to engage class, gender, heteronormativity, and racialization as *processes of social reproduction*, rather than always-already existing states of being. What is more, it can accomplish these without either *denying* identity's political relevance, as so many Marxists tend to do, nor obscuring the play of *structure*, of *material life*, of *labouring practices* in seemingly 'non-class' struggles, as is too often common in poststructuralist analyses.

The emphasis on process and relationship is particularly-well articulated by Judith Butler, for whom the starting point of analysis is a Nietzschean distinction between 'doer' and 'deed'. This acknowledgement that identities and institutions are products of social interaction rather than pre-existing states requires that we maintain an analytic and political focus on the ways that social relationships are produced and reproduced, on how they are constituted through their ongoing performance; "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed', but...the 'doer' is invariably constructed in and through the deed" (Butler, 1990: 142). It is human action and interaction which is primary, and thus the political field is made more open to the subversion of normalcy and the multiplication of alternative potentials. Thus while the political usefulness of Butler's own work is limited by its focus on discursive production and individual interaction to the exclusion of class

struggles and labouring practices (Hennessey, 1996: 225-8), her presentation of the problem has important implications for materialist, class-oriented analyses⁸³. Indeed, what are material institutions but the long-term and presumed-immutable outcomes of previous relationships? What are 'structural barriers' but the concrete material implications of 'doing' or 'performing' social life according to culturally-, politically-, economically-, militarily-enforced rules of interaction?

Thus it is here that we come to the concrete, political significance of queer theory for class struggles and for alternative ways of living: the queer theory approach provides an alternative set of questions which emphasize not only individuals in social relationships, but the production and reproduction of those relationships themselves, and the always-existing gaps and breaks in social systems. When articulated with reference to concrete, material outcomes of relationships, queer theory emphasizes the production of alternative alliances and strategies which engage the reproduction of inequality as social process rather than as hegemonic entity, and provokes a political strategy in which liberation is not something 'found', but achieved through ongoing processes of struggle, of solidarity in difference, and of relationship-building.

Queer theory, then, is not only or even primarily about understanding sexual diversity, but represents a significantly different approach to political analysis, and one which holds enormous potential for class-analysts and class movements that seek an alternative to the legacy of Second and Third

⁸³ Many queer theorists acknowledge a debt in this regard to Althusser, whose own somewhat contradictory political legacy has included both an archtypical ahistoric structuralism and such important concepts as *overdetermination*, a notion which intersects in many ways with post-structuralist treatments of identity, and with queer theory in particular. See L. Althusser, *For Marx* (1979).

International Marxist-Leninist orthodoxies. It is an alternative way of thinking about social relationships which emphasizes process rather than product, subversive potential rather than end-goal. Its implications for class analysis and political class struggle are to be found in the way it constructs domination and resistance as *dynamic*, as *relational*, as *potential*. Process and relationship become the central concerns not only of analysis, but of struggle as well, so that subversion is something to be uncovered and exploded, rather than a set of tenets to be planted among workers who are then left to fight a war of attrition for some always-promised yet never attained state of bliss.

WORKING CLASSES

SINCE ZIMBABWE AND MY INTRODUCTION TO THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND PAN-
AFRICANIST MOVEMENTS, I HAD BEEN STRUGGLING WITH THE WHOLE NOTION OF THE
WORKING CLASS – A CLASS WHICH CLEARLY COULD NOT BE UNDERSTOOD IN UNITARY
TERMS, BUT A CLASS, TOO, THAT SEEMED TO DISSOLVE INTO NOTHING WHEN ATTEMPTS
WERE MADE TO PLURALIZE. IT STRUCK ME THAT THIS SAME QUESTION SAT AT THE ROOT
OF ALL THE MAJOR DEBATES ON THE LEFT – THE PROCESS OF WORKING CLASS
CONSTITUTION SEEMED KEY TO PROCESSES OF STRUGGLE AND TO WHAT WE MEANT BY
'LIBERATION'.

AND THEN, IN THE EARLY 1990S, THE PROBLEM OF WHAT CONSTITUTED WORKING CLASS
RESISTANCE HIT THE FRONT PAGE OF THE VANCOUVER SUN. DAVID KORESH IN WACO,
THE MICHIGAN MILITIA, THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING – THE EARLY AND MID 1990S SAW
PITCHED BATTLES BETWEEN THE U.S. STATE AND RIGHT-WING, OFTEN-RACIST GROUPS
COMPRISED LARGELY OF UNEMPLOYED WHITE WORKERS. SWAT TEAMS AND VARIOUS
BRANCHES OF THE ARMED FORCES WERE DEPLOYED WITH FEROCITY, AT TIMES MOVING
SWIFTLY TO LEGAL EXECUTIONS, AT TIMES RAZING ENTIRE COMMUNITIES OF MEN,
WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THE LEFT FELT NO NEED TO DISTANCE ITSELF FROM THE
VIOLENCE – THESE WERE THE CHILDREN OF THE RIGHT GONE TOO FAR, AND WHERE
COMMENT WAS MADE AT ALL IT WAS TO CALL ATTENTION TO THE RESURGENCE OF ARMED
LIBERTARIAN THREAT.

IT ALL LEFT ME FEELING RATHER DISTURBED, FOR THESE STAND-OFFS SEEMED TO BE MOMENTS OF WORKING CLASS REVOLT – NOT AS THE LEFT HOPED IT WOULD APPEAR, BUT AS DESPERATE STRIKES FROM A WHITE, MALE WORKING CLASS WHO SAW ITS RELATIVE PRIVILEGE AND ITS MONOPOLY OF THE IDENTITY 'THE AMERICAN WORKER' SLIP AWAY. THESE WERE, IT SEEMED TO ME, GASPS OF A PARTICULAR NOTION OF THE WORKING CLASS FACING EXTINCTION. AND IF THERE WERE ANY LINGERING RELATIONSHIP IN MY MIND BETWEEN CLASS DYNAMICS AND PARTICULAR IDEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS, THEY EXPLODED AS I WATCHED THE BRANCH DAVIDIAN COMPOUND BURN AND TIMOTHY MCVEIGH WALK, HEAD-BOWED, TO HIS MURDER. HERE WAS ANOTHER WORKING CLASS, FRACTURED AND DEFEATED, BUT IN THAT – OR PERHAPS PRECISELY *BECAUSE OF THAT* – A RAW, TERRIFYING AND DESTRUCTIVE POWER.

A FEW YEARS LATER I FOUND MYSELF THINKING BACK ON THESE IN AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT CONTEXT. AFTER A LONG WEEK ORGANIZING A WORK TO RULE ACTION AT THE TELUS CALL CENTRE, I SAT ALL NIGHT IN A SMALL ROOM AT UBC, DESPERATELY TRYING TO PULL TOGETHER A PRESENTATION FOR GILLIAN'S SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS COURSE THE NEXT MORNING. I SETTLED ON THE CLASS LOCATION OF THE PROSTITUTE, THINKING PARTICULARLY OF A RECENT SUCCESSFUL UNIONIZATION DRIVE AT SAN FRANCISCO'S 'LUSTY LADY' PEEP SHOW, AND ONGOING DEBATES IN MY OWN EAST-SIDE NEIGHBOURHOOD ABOUT THE DECRIMINALIZATION OF SEX-WORK. AS I FOLLOWED REFERENCES AND CITATIONS FURTHER AND FURTHER BACK INTO HISTORY, HOWEVER, I ENDED WITH A VERY DIFFERENT QUESTION THAN I'D STARTED WITH – NOT, HOW IS THERE

ROOM IN 'THE WORKING CLASS' FOR SEX WORKERS, BUT HOW DID THE VERY IDEA OF THE PROSTITUTE EMERGE AS AN INTEGRAL PILLAR OF THE IDEA OF THE WORKING CLASS?

AND THAT LED ME STILL FURTHER, BACK TO A STORY I'D HEARD IN NIGERIA YEARS BEFORE, OF A BEGGAR'S STRIKE, IN WHICH THOSE WHO MADE THEIR LIVINGS ON HANDOUTS FROM PASSERS-BY OUTSIDE THE MOSQUE SIMPLY REFUSED, ONE DAY, TO ACCEPT ANY; AND HOW, IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN ISLAM AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE WELL-TO-DO TO MAKE REGULAR DONATIONS AS A PART OF EVERYDAY WORSHIP, THE LACK OF OPPORTUNITY TO PAY ALMS TO THE POOR SHOOK THE COMMUNITY TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT THE DEMANDS OF THE BEGGARS — FOR UNHINDERED ACCESS TO THE MOSQUE AND A MORE GENERAL RECOGNITION OF THEIR IMPORTANT SOCIAL ROLE — WERE MET WITHIN DAYS.

AND FINALLY I RECALLED A STRIKE OF TORONTO TAXI DRIVERS, AND ITS WHOLESALE DISMISSAL BY LEADING SCHOLARS OF MARXISM AND BY THE LABOUR MOVEMENT — FOR THESE ARE CLEARLY PETTY-BOURGEOIS DEMANDS, COMING AS THEY DO FROM A GROUP THAT CANNOT BE CALLED 'WORKERS' IN ANY MEANINGFUL SENSE OF THE TERM — AND I FOUND MYSELF WHOLLY AND ENTIRELY DIS-SATISFIED WITH THE IDEA OF CLASS AS I'D KNOWN IT, AND WHOLLY AND ENTIRELY CONVINCED THAT SOMETHING CALLED CLASS STRUGGLE WAS VIBRANT AND ALIVE IN FORMS SURPRISING, UPLIFTING, AND SOMETIMES DANGEROUS — IN FORMS AND AMONG PEOPLE TOO OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN THE LEFT'S GRAND VISION OF STRUGGLE.

The multitude....shuns political unity, is recalcitrant to obedience, never achieves the status of juridical personage, and is thus unable to make promises, to make pacts, or to acquire and transfer rights. It is anti-state, but, precisely for this reason, it is also anti-popular: the citizens, when they rebel against the state, are 'the Multitude' against 'the People'.

Paolo Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution", pp. 200-201

What we here choose to call communism, however, should not be thought of as an always-already deferred utopia...It should be thought of, rather...as an always actually existing radical praxis that seeks to imagine the unimaginable within various actually existing social orders...

For the history of communism – and of the desire for communism – is an ancient one...all that its moments have in common is an antagonistic relation various realities and various official modes of community and, more often than not, to the multifarious coercions of state power. This is in other words a fundamentally transhistorical history of struggle and desire.

Saree Makdisi, Cesare Cesarino and Rebecca Karl
"Introduction: Marxism, Communism and History", pp. 2-4

Chapter 10

Hydra, Nomads, Multitude:

class and revolution after the capital-L left

To this point we have traced the development of what is called 'the left' from its formative concept 'the working class' through the primary organizational strategies and political agendas it has pursued. And a central focus has been the poverty of that left's analytical and political traditions, particularly as evidenced in the severe crisis the left experienced following the collapse and/ or paralysis, in a relatively short period of time, of its major organizations, their strategies and some absolutely formative assumptions. None of this is news. Nor is it news to anyone that a consensus has yet to gel on what might replace or rehabilitate what has fallen.

But that is not to say that people aren't trying. Some, emerging from the new social movement tradition, retain the emphasis on identity, attempting to understand how those engaged in struggle understand their subjectivity. Alain Touraine, for example, suggests that what is critical is each individual's own self-construction, and that what is called for is a dramatically new approach to social analysis in which the focus is shifted from systems and societies to individuals and identities (Touraine, 2002). Others in the new social movement school stress new ways of understanding collectivity – with each movement neither an undifferentiated mass nor simply an aggregate of individuals, but understood instead by *how* they come together. John Urry, for example, develops the metaphor of flow – social movements as liquids pouring across a surface (cited in

McDonald, 2006: 9) - while Kevin McDonald adopts musical terminology, emphasizing rhythms of struggle, resonances across the social fabric (McDonald, 2006: 224-5). To these voices are added those like Charles Tilly who continue to work in expressly political traditions but under the social movement rubric, and well-known post-structuralist figures, such as Pierre Bourdieu, for whom the fundamental questions centre around how some subjects become defined as movements and take on a new life as social forces (Bourdieu, 1985).

Indeed, the extensive debate on class owes a great deal to Bourdieu (Bennet and Savage, 2005). Situating class at the analytical intersection of culture and economics, much recent discussion of the concept either flows from or responds to his concept of 'cultural capital', which emphasizes neither productive relations nor economic stratification but the ways certain social subjects are able to 'seize' opportunity and "introduce the future by a kind of practical induction" (Robbins, 2005).

In a more overtly 'left' approach – and with explicit reference to major anarchist traditions - Richard Day's *Gramsci is Dead* (2005)⁸⁴ adopts aspects of

⁸⁴ It was quite exciting to find this book late in my own writing process. (Thanks, Bob!), Day and I were at SFU together – he doing a Sociology Ph.D. while I worked on my Latin American Studies MA – during a period when that university was home to people in various disciplines who were all confronting the crisis of the left and the possibilities for synthesis of certain Marxist, anarchist and post-structuralist traditions. While I came from an explicitly socialist background, Day was engaged primarily with post-structuralist literature and anarchist movements. We shared, though, exposure to a vibrant debate about autonomist and libertarian Marxisms that included Michael Lebowitz, Conrad Herold, Dorothy Kidd and Nick Dyer-Witheford. Those discussions had a profound influence on me, and I could not help noticing that Day's book centres upon the same questions, the same tensions, the same potentials as this thesis. Day starts with anarchism and post-structuralism, and says little about Marxism other than its most mainstream Leninist incarnations; I begin with Marxism, and am far less familiar with the anarchist and post-structuralist traditions he comes from. And yet there is a substantial commonality in the two projects, including a significant overlap in our literatures. While I disagree with Day's conclusions, then, I am struck more by how similar our projects are, and can only imagine that the commonality arises from our shared experience at SFU in the mid-nineties

the social movement lingo to consider not 'the working class' as such, but the political strategies envisioned by those engaged in decidedly anti-capitalist politics. Day argues that recent struggles, particularly those against various incarnations of neoliberal globalization, have moved away from a solidarity based on common identity to an affinity-approach rooted in commonalities built among people seeking their own self-liberation. The difference is played out in a number of ways: in a shift from organizing others to organizing oneself; in the trading of overarching notions of liberation for issue- and moment-specific aims; in an emphasis on achievable alternative ways of living rather than any utopian 'new world'; and in a recognition that something called freedom cannot be made for anyone, but must be an individual choice (Ibid. 126). And all this, he suggests, has important consequences for how those on the left think about class, class struggle and revolution – all core concepts of the left, and all thoroughly imbued with a notion of hegemony he believes to be well past its due date.

Hegemony, for Day – and here the anarchist in him loses out to the post-structuralist – is a fundamentally modernist concept, and one whose logic has itself achieved an hegemony on the left, drawing our focus exclusively towards system-wide struggles against state and capital. And never mind that such approaches are unlikely to ever amount to more than fancy – for the state is always already within us, an internalized voice of command (Ibid., 34); equally troubling, he suggests, is what this means for revolution – that revolution can only ever be an hegemonic act, an act of force, and therefore itself, by its very definition, an act of domination (Ibid., 126). That is, appeals to the working class

necessarily impose a unitary identity which has been irrelevant for some generations; appeals to struggle against state and capital imply a shared utopia that is neither shared nor ever-achievable; appeals to revolution imply acts of coercion which cannot be compatible with any meaningful freedom. And the left, then, if it is to have any relevance in this drastically re-made world, must bury Gramsci and all he represents, and locate itself instead in the plurality and vibrancy of real human struggle and the building of real human relationships not beyond or even necessarily against capital, but away from it. It's all got a bit of the 'drop -out' logic to it, and one is left wondering what kind of anti-capitalism can be imagined that involves no anti-capitalist coercions; but that said, Day is tapping into something new here, something less identifiable, less unitary, less stationary than any kind of working class we've seen before. And in this he's not alone⁸⁵.

In their follow-up to *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri chronicle the resistance of what they deem a new global post-class, the *multitude*. Where the idea of *the People* took shape with direct reference to the nation-state, and *the working class* emerged from and was tied to industrial capitalism, they argue, *multitude* represents a new collective subject, and a new tension, specific to contemporary, globalized capital (Hardt and Negri, 2004: xiv-xvi). Harkening back to Tronti's arguments that different incarnations of capital engender different

⁸⁵ Day is not the first by an stretch to extend the concept of the state to an internal self-discipline of the individual. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) make a similar point about the fascism within us all. They, however, don't take this to mean that anti-state projects are therefore inevitably doomed to failure and not worth fighting. In this, Deleuze and Guattari seem to end with the optimism of Robert Michels – that in the struggle itself is the freedom – whereas Day takes us to Michels at his most pessimistic while somehow hoping to rebuild a smaller-scale optimism from the ashes. See Chapter 13 on Robert Michels and democracy in organization and struggle.

strategies of working class organization and struggle, the multitude they posit is immediately and always global, and acts not through a vanguardist Party or any disciplinary framework, but through networks and circuits of struggle in which autonomous activities of individuals and groups impart a collective and mass impact against capital. That is, as capital operates today via circuits of production – whether of goods, services, or knowledge – the creative counter-power of workers operates similarly, through a heterogeneity that neither requires nor tolerates the imposition of a grand plan (Ibid. xv-vi). And its purpose, too – if it can be said to have one (which the authors would likely dispute) – is something less clear than that of the traditional class struggle trajectory: for the multitude is no more and no less than the commons embodied. As a spontaneous subject, a shifting subject comprised of innumerable ideas, actions, creations unified only by their self-generation and their existence outside of capital and state, the multitude is common-ing in action.

It is an intriguing idea, and one that has the benefit of being free of the historical baggage associated with 'the working class'. But that the concept can adequately *replace* the idea of the working class is not clear to me. Firstly, even they themselves seem unclear as to how the concept differs from the *working class* as understood by Dalla Costa, Selma James, and others who use the term broadly to refer to any and all relationships that move against capital. Secondly, when they do attempt to specify the difference, the only issue seems to be their point that today no productive activity creates commodities alone, but always also culture, relationships, and life itself. It begs the question – if class is a

relationship, as they would be the first to argue, and if always and everywhere what we call 'structure' is better understood as the historical legacy of everyday relationships densely interwoven such that it seems to carry a force of its own – where, then, is the distinctiveness of this era? Has not all production in all times also produced relationship, culture, process? Nonetheless, the insights are important ones, drawing our attention to the commonalities in the current structure of capital and governance and in the modes and objects of resistance.

On the latter point – strategies for resistance – another collaborator of Michael Hardt's makes a compatible case, though without abandoning the language of class. Indeed, Paolo Virno also adopts the notion of *multitude*, but frames it not in place of but in addition to, the working class subject. His multitude is similar to Hardt and Negri's, but does not need to replace the working class because it is recognized as a different beast altogether – here, again, a force without a unitary will, collective in its immediate common-ing, but an overtly *political* expression, not in the sense of contestation for the state but in its positing for another social power altogether (1996b: 201). Here Virno resurrects Tronti's notion of refusal (though without acknowledging it as such) in his call for *exodus*. This is no retreat from the barricades, but an active and conscious exit from the traditional arenas of struggle to something else.

Exodus is defection – implying that it is not only movement *from*, but also a movement *to* something different. Using as example Italian youth who have *en masse* sought temporary, part-time employment precisely because their mobility and contingency can be deployed as weapons against employers, Virno

imagines similar strategies of exit that can accomplish “a free-thinking inventiveness that changes the rules of the game and disorients the enemy” (Ibid.: 199). Such tactics, he argues, do not engage capital or state on their own terrain, but develop instead entirely new modes and spaces of struggle that cannot be anticipated in advance and are not grounded in any pre-established order. Not only does exodus not seek any power-sharing, then, it also does not even acknowledge those sites of power as having any legitimacy whatever, but poses new spaces and new relationships instead. The social democratic left sought a share in parliamentary democracy; the Communist left sought to topple that state-form and establish another; but the multitude has never sought state power, or claimed it. It does not create, but topples governments. And in so doing, it actively builds another power outside the state and both prior to and beyond it – the power of disobedience⁸⁶.

Marco Revelli sees contemporary resistance in a different light, but equally marked by movement and destabilization of the traditional sites of social struggle. Starting from the profound uprootedness experienced by workers⁸⁷ (in his piece, auto workers) in a labour regime characterized by transitory and shifting employment, Revelli explores the concept of *nomadism* in class identities (Revello, 1996: 116). If there was a central experience in the formation of working class identities, he notes – at least so far as traditional trade unions and

⁸⁶ In 2003, Virno's *multitude* made exactly this kind of appearance in Bolivia; as the government was toppled by mass protest, no delegated or self-delegated group stepped forward to take power. Indeed, as participants explicitly told North American journalists – ‘we will see who is next and how he does; if we are dissatisfied, he too will go.’

⁸⁷ For more on the destabilization of workplace-based identities, see Huws, 2006b, for discussion of what the author refers to as ‘footloose’ and ‘fractured’ identities of labour.

workers' Parties were concerned – it was the experience of the labouring practice, an experience which took shape in the Fordist era within the walls of the factory and through a standardized and routine work process. That working life, he argues, “laid the basis not only for political meaning, but also for underlying motivations, shared values, and the ability to read and orient one's life” (Ibid.: 117). And in studying workers' experiences with the collapse of that order, it became apparent that those who suffered ‘most devastatingly’ were those with the most stable and fixed workplace identities, and the most stable and fixed sites and processes of work. Conversely, those with the most precarious employment histories suffered the least psychological damage from the end of Fordism.

But Revelli's is not a psychological exercise. What is striking, he finds, is that these differences have an acute significance for the will to resist, and the ability to develop new identities as workers. Whereas previously union and Party activists were drawn from the most stable groups of workers, increasingly it is in the ranks of contingent and temporary workers that one finds the greatest motivation to struggle and the most creative – and ultimately successful – strategies (Revelli, 1996). And here, then, is the significance of *nomadism* for class struggle today – while we lament the inability of unions and Parties to develop strategies able to match those of capital and state, and while we continue to examine how damaged the political working class has been by the destabilization of the industrial relations regime, we too often miss the potential that is opened up – the potential that precarious workers discovered long ago,

that beyond the factory is a new identity, rooted not in a unitary community but a shifting one. And there is a resistance, too, beyond the legally-constituted strike, beyond the ballot box, that can and does appear from the sands and vanish and appear again just as quickly.

A final metaphor for contemporary class struggle comes to us from Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, whose study of sailor and slave resistance in the eighteenth century evokes the image of resistance as *hydra* (Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000). The piece is a historical study of geographically diverse rebellions in the 17th and 18th centuries that nonetheless informed and built upon one another, such that the image of the many-headed beast 'the hydra' was regularly deployed by capital and the press to describe the threat from all sides. Into the vast literature chronicling the provincialism and outright racism in the making of the working class, Linebaugh and Rediker toss a history of cooperation and solidarity across bounds of black and white, Christian and Muslim, wage worker and slave, pirate and citizen, in which the ship acted as "a forcing house of internationalism" (Ibid: 151), producing revolts in which "there is so little Government and Subordination among them, that they are, on Occasion, all Captains, all Leaders (Ibid: 163).

That this emerged at sea, too, is of significance. Following a century of violent expropriation of land both in Europe and the colonies, the reality of landlessness and the institutionalization of wage labour shifted the terrain of the contested commons to the seas – a space in which the coercive apparatuses of capital and state were less easily deployed, and which held greater possibilities

for resistance. And thus we come again to the present.— to a moment in history not unlike which Linebaugh and Rediker explore: a moment in which the commons emerges on new terrain, the working class reveals itself as profoundly diverse and utterly global, waged and unwaged labour find themselves side by side in singular processes of production, and vast contested spaces emerge which had never before been considered. And again we see a resistance from diverse corners, at first glance entirely regional, specific, isolated. And yet, perhaps, this is something else — many heads of a single beast.

None of the above directly situate themselves in the old language of the left. But none, either, is really outside of that conceptual framework, and so it should be possible to think through the notion of working class with these newer metaphors mind. Let me try, then, to return to the key concepts that we've followed through these pages:

to *class* — which seems either rooted in a specific labour regime that has come and gone, and which even then could not adequately capture the complexity of capital's relations; but which when recast in notions such as *multitude* seems to have either expanded to the point of meaninglessness or become so fragmented as to have nothing to do with production;

to *revolution* — which as a concept has essentially vanished from the landscape, used more often to describe technological leaps and

occasionally trotted out where mass rebellion results in regime change without utopia;

to *work* – whose very origin in violence is still largely untroubled as left organizations campaign for more work, or better work; I can't help but feel the loss of a healthy revolutionary anti-work ethic is perhaps one of the most devastating impacts of the left's adoption of the capitalist categories like 'productive', and its conception of socialism as an order for managing accumulation.

"When you put it like that it is almost enough to make me feel communism might not be inevitable after all", says Sid with a sour grin. But I retain some hope that, with a focus upon resistance to order rather than an alternative order, we can rehabilitate Marxism as method, as framework to analyze the real movement of class struggle, and perhaps make class mean something as a concept, a politics, and as a measure by which to evaluate organizational and strategic choices; I am hopeful that by imagining *hydra*, *nomads*, *multitude* and *exodus* we can focus on a few key questions to ask of our organizations, strategies and socialisms - more freedom or less? into capital, or away? And where are the oppressions and solidarities in each and every relationship we enter?

REMEMBERING BOB EVERTON, 2004

DECEMBER, 2004, AND HUNDREDS GATHER IN THE WISE HALL, THIS BIT OF COMMUNITY SPACE WITH PAINT PEELING FROM SO MANY FOLK SONGS, SO MANY ANARCHIST GATHERINGS, SO MANY DREAMS OF GENERAL STRIKE, SO MANY REVOLUTIONARY VOICES, SO MUCH DANCING, AND THE OCCASIONAL FETISH PARTY. TONIGHT THE WALLS ARE ONCE AGAIN PLASTERED WITH POSTERS AND FLAGS – THERE'S CHE, READING WITH A SMALL SMILE; ALLENDE WATCHES FROM SEVERAL ANGLES, HIS EYES FLASHING BETWEEN BARS OF BLACK AND RED. NAMES OF MARTYRS AND GUERRILLA HOPES SURROUND – FSLN, MIR, URNG, FMLN AND ON AND ON. AND IN ALL THESE, BOB EVERTON.

BOB DIED OF A HEART ATTACK AT 52 – TOO SHORT A LIFE, BUT WHAT A LIFE. HAULED TO THE STADIUM WITH CHILEAN COMRADES IN 1973, HE GOT OUT. LIVING ON CHILE'S BORDERS FOR YEARS, ORGANIZING ESCAPE ROUTES FOR EXILES AND ARMED RESISTERS. LEADING REBELLIOUS PARADES THROUGH DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER ON A REGULAR BASIS. QUIETLY WATCHING MEETINGS OF THIS EASTSIDE COMMUNITY, WHETHER TO PLAN AN UPRISING OR EXTEND THE HOURS OF A RECREATION CENTRE. PROVIDING MORPHINE TO A BOLIVIAN CAMPESINA WHO CAN'T BEAR TO LIVE WITH CERVICAL CANCER. CROSSING THE SAHARA AND WALKING AFRICA. IN ALL OF THIS, BOB KNEW ONE THING ONLY – THE REVOLUTION IS COMING TOMORROW. EACH NIGHT HE FELL ASLEEP WONDERING WHY IT HADN'T HAPPENED; EACH MORNING HE KNEW WITH COMPLETE CERTAINTY IT WAS TODAY. AND IN EACH CONVERSATION, EACH GATHERING, HE TOOK TO HEART CHE'S REMINDER THAT REVOLUTION IS LOVE PRACTICED, AND STOOD OUT TALL AND QUIET IN THIS FRACTURED AND SECTARIAN LEFT PRECISELY BECAUSE HE

WAS UNIQUE IN HIS NON-TOLERANCE FOR SUCH BULLSHIT WHEN THERE'S A WAR TO BE FOUGHT, A MEAL TO SHARE, A STRIKE TO SING WITH, A FRIEND TO KISS.

WE SING OUR GOODBYES TO BOB, WHILE CRYING AND JOKING AND PLANNING THE NEXT DEMONSTRATION. WE SING BECAUSE WE KNOW THE REVOLUTION IS COMING TOMORROW. AND I SING BECAUSE IN THIS ROOM, IN THIS MEMORIAL, I CAN HEAR AGAIN THE GUNFIRE IN RIO SAN JUAN; I CAN WATCH AGAIN AS MY FATHER STRAPS ON THAT OLD RIFLE TO DO HIS MILITIA DUTY; I CAN FEEL AGAIN THE WEIGHT OF A ZIMBABWEAN FREEDOM-FIGHTER'S JACKET ON MY SHOULDERS AS I'M CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY THE FROST IN THE AIR; I CAN FEEL THE FLOOR RUMBLE UNDER MY FEET WITH CUBA'S FIERCE DANCING; I CAN READ AGAIN KARL GASPAR'S QUIET POEMS SMUGGLED OUT OF FILIPINO PRISONS; I CAN TOUCH AGAIN MARTA AND ENRIQUE'S FACES, SCARRED WITH CUTS AND BURNS, COCA-COLA'S GIFT TO ITS UNION ACTIVISTS; BUT MOST OF ALL I REMEMBER PEOPLE AND LOVE AND HOPE AND SONG AND LAUGHTER — IN SMOKE, OVER GUNFIRE, AND THROUGH DAD'S MIDNIGHT RUNS TO BRING REFUGEES ACROSS THE BORDER.

BOB'S DEATH IS IMPORTANT. THE LAST FEW YEARS HE HAS JOINED US IN AN ONGOING CONVERSATION ACROSS THE DIVIDES OF VARIOUS COMMUNIST PARTIES, TRADE UNIONS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, A PROJECT LOOSELY DESCRIBED AS 'PROJECT X' OR 'REBUILDING THE LEFT'. THAT EFFORT WAS SAVED FROM COLLAPSE BY THE ATTACKS ON THE TWIN TOWERS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF U.S. MILITARY ACTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST — NOTHING LIKE A REAL CRISIS TO GET US OUT OF MEETING-ROOMS AND INTO THE

STREETS AGAIN. BUT ALL THOSE DIVERSE VOICES ARE HERE AGAIN TONIGHT, AND THOSE CONVERSATIONS ARE HAPPENING AGAIN OVER DRINKS AND SONGS AND MEMORIES.

BOB'S DEATH IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT REMINDS ALL OF US IN THIS ROOM THAT THE REVOLUTION HAPPENS EVERY DAY, THE REVOLUTION IS MADE RELATIONSHIP BY RELATIONSHIP, DANCE BY DANCE, AND MEAL BY MEAL. AND IT REMINDS US THAT STILL MORE RESISTANCE IS COMING TOMORROW – THERE IS NO QUESTION ABOUT THAT. THE ONLY QUESTION, REALLY, IS – DOES ANYTHING CALLED 'THE LEFT' HAVE A CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE, AND ARE WE READY TO WELCOME THE REVOLUTION WHEN IT KNOCKS?

On January 1st 1994, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect in Mexico, armed rebels calling themselves the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) took over 4 towns in Chiapas, calling for land reform and greater autonomy for indigenous peoples. After 12 days of fighting, and in the face of massive public support for the Zapatistas, the government called a cease-fire and peace talks began. However, the government did not agree to the Zapatistas' demands, and the proposals that were taken back to the Zapatista communities were rejected after a lengthy consultation period. During this time the Zapatistas began occupying properties and ranches belonging to wealthy landowners, and by mid-1995 over 1,500 properties totaling 90,000 hectares had been occupied. To this day there are 32 Zapatista municipalities, covering nearly a third of Chiapas, which are effectively autonomous from the Mexican state, and are run collectively by the local communities.

from Do or Die, Issue 9
<http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no9/index.html>

Taken together, the string of protests since Seattle in 1999, which have torn through Washington, Melbourne, Prague, Seoul, Nice, Barcelona, Washington DC, Quebec City, Gothenburg and Genoa, have cost more than \$250m in security precautions, damage and lost business. Hundreds have been injured, several shot and one young man has been killed...

And it does not have one source. Many tributaries have swollen counter-capitalism: the anti-apartheid movement, the campaigns against US intervention in Central America, environmentalism, the emergence of protest movements in the Third World, famine relief in Africa, the Asian financial crisis, human rights protection, Acid House raves in Europe, road rallies organized by Reclaim the Streets and hip-hop music...

Tom Hayden, *Evidence of Things Unseen*, <http://www.zmag.org>

On October 17, 2003, the anniversary of the nationalization of Gulf Oil in 1969, Bolivian President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and his closest allies and advisors fled to Miami.

The party that had implemented neoliberalism in Bolivia had been broken by overwhelming popular opposition to the denationalization and proposed sell-off of gas reserves. Around the presidential palace, a multitude had gathered - miners, farmworkers, indigenous people's organizations, housewives, trade unionists, children, teachers, students, market women, butchers, bakers, truckers, taxi drivers - to say: 'you will go, or we will take you' - to demonstrate the ability of a people to dislodge a regime simply by refusing to comply. A sound byte capturing a mineworker's thoughts on the days ahead sent the message around the world - this crowd would elect no government, would write no policies, but would watch carefully whoever stepped up to take official political power:

'It doesn't matter who governs. We will wait. If they anger us, they will go. That is our power.'

Adapted from various news sources

Chapter 11

Funeral for the Wrong Corpse:

working class resistance after the death of socialism

Picking Up the Pieces:

Siegelbaum and Suny note that "the history of a class is inseparable from the discursive claims about that class which seek to reorder the world in their own terms. Like a nation, a class is an 'imagined community'" (1994: 7). In other words, just as gender, race, sexuality and class are co-constitutive of one another, so too are notions of class, socialism, political organization and alliance intimately bound with one another. It is not enough, then, to simply imagine alternatives; those alternatives depend upon ongoing critical re-thinkings of our most basic analytical and political concepts – class, capital, socialism, organization, identity, and so on.

Fortunately, there is a substantial body of work from which to begin; feminist scholars since the 1970s have directly tackled both ideal-typical conceptions of *the worker* and analyses which oppose a male *working life* to a female *domestic life*, asking (among other things), "in what ways did pre-existing gender relations contribute to the emergence of class society?", "how are working class struggles, including strikes waged exclusively by men, sustained and/or weakened by gendered divisions of labour and the unpaid work of women?", "how are definitions of 'skilled' and 'unskilled' work premised on inequalities of race and gender?" and "how is the globalization of capital and the

increasing role of Third World women in waged work recomposing the working class globally, and identifying new terrains and strategies for struggle?" (Acker, 1990; Bakan and Stasiulis, 1997; Beechey, 1987; Chhechhi and Pittin, 1996; Freeman, 2000; Mies, 1986; Mitter, 1994).

Those collectively referred to as "post-colonial thinkers" – some explicitly linked to the post-structuralism that names them such, others veterans or children of the national liberation movements of the 1960s-1980s - have (following Fanon [1963 and 1967] and Said [1994]) raised similarly important questions about race and the ongoing centrality of conquest and colonization to our basic ideas and assumptions: how is it such common-sense notions as 'human rights', statehood, and pluralism remain untroubled even on the left given their origins in a system of nation-states founded upon empire? how does social theory get written with little or no reference to the basic ideology of conquest that lies at the heart of the very idea of civilization (Lindqvist, 1996)? how, in real political terms as well as philosophical ones, do we grapple with the concrete fact that the First World has moved into the Third, and the Third World into the First? and when and how will you, they ask, begin to reconcile your progressive, forward-thinking and plural left to the fact that sometimes the real life and death political struggles against Empire are waged by unsavory characters you simply can't allow yourselves to be associated with?

These are real questions, and they go to the core of the left and will be central to any effective re-thinking of identity, organization, resistance, liberation. But do they leave any space for class, class struggle, socialism, communism?

I have suggested some hope that the idea and practice of communism may yet be saved "from its own disrepute" (Guattari and Negri, 1990: 7) through the rediscovery of non-Leninist traditions, and provided some examples of where the intellectual and political work of this rehabilitation is actively underway. But in political terms, our organizations remain. And whether we operate within or against them, as the case may be, we do, as something called the left, continue to define ourselves with reference to them. So what do we do with what we've inherited, and where we've come from?

The Trade Union After the Working Class:

As the paradigmatic workers' organization, as virtually the sole widely-recognized 'voice' of workers and of the left since the collapse of the Communist Party, the union remains – for all its fractures and cleavages – an incredibly significant example (whether positive or negative) of class organization and class struggle. And its fate between the 1970s and the present has been the subject of extensive discussion, as analysts and activists alike have sought to explain the crisis and identify strategies for renewal. Some, like Craig Heron (1989), consider the current challenge to be not unlike others faced and survived in earlier eras, and simply reiterate that the conditions of inequality are themselves enough to ensure an ongoing role for the union movement. Others, such as Steve Babson (1999) in the U.S. and Bryan Palmer (1983) in Canada, recalling the years of industrial unionism's strength, take the current crisis as an opportunity for labour to re-learn the skills of cross-sectoral organizing and direct action so that it may

play a meaningful role as working class representative in this era of naked capitalism (Ross and Jenson, 1986; Gapasin and Yates, 2005). And still others, among them Ian Robinson (2000) and Paul Johnston (2000), take note of tentative steps toward cooperation with community-based social movements as well as renewed organizing and international solidarity, hopeful that these, together with the apparently-emerging realization that the old system is no more, promise a democratization and radicalization of labour to meet the challenges of the present. The best of this work emphasizes the places this is already happening, providing insight into the debates and cleavages within organized labour and the potential spaces for something to develop that is beyond the traditional union and yet firmly grounded in labouring practices and the established networks of the labour movement (Carroll and Ratner 1995; Silver and Arrighi, 2001).

But for all their insights, each of the above approaches either fails to address unions' own responsibility for the current impasse in any significant way, or resurrects earlier forms of organization without consideration of their limitations or their applicability to the present. More fruitful, I would suggest, is an analysis which begins with four premises:

- (a) acknowledgement of the collapse of Keynesianism as definitive and final;
- (b) an appreciation of the fact that capital's success in imposing austerity is related to the trade union movement's inability to mount any effective resistance or to articulate an alternative to

the status quo, which itself is a product of the contemporary trade union model and Keynesian industrial relations regime associated with it;

- (c) recognition that *working class* refers not to an identifiable and static group, but to a relational position; recognition, too, that class positions are multiply constituted, by (for example) gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age etc. That is, though the collective class subject can be identified across temporal, geographic, cultural and political boundaries, and is in that sense 'universal', the shape and appearance of that subject is transitory and ever-shifting;
- (d) appreciation that the above implies that different forms of organization are suitable to different eras and different incarnations/ compositions of the class, and that a renewal of effective popular struggle against capital will likely require the creation of *new* organizational forms and *new* strategies appropriate to contemporary circumstances. What is more, these new forms and strategies cannot be expected to emerge within organized labour, but are more likely to be found in the multiplicity of resistances to austerity and the sectors which played such a key role in undermining the Keynesian deal – and by extension the trade union - in the first place.

In other words, what we understand to be *the trade union* is an organizational form which originally emerged to serve the needs of a very particular group of workers – white, 'skilled', and male, whose relative privilege *vis a vis* other workers was threatened with the ascent of industrial capitalism and the Fordist mass worker. Insofar as that model was expanded and reconfigured after the 1930s, the labour movement consolidated its victories in a tripartite industrial relations regime which acknowledged the legitimacy of workers' demands only as they facilitated productivity increases and were pegged to a steady rate of profit. When once again a political recomposition of global working class struggles effectively challenged the limits of entitlement in the post-1968 era, the trade union model was thrown into crisis not only by its lack of preparation or the political conservatism of some of its members, but precisely because its organizational structure and strategic vision were thoroughly bound up with the tripartite model and with the Keynesian compromise (Finnamore, 2004; Fletcher, 2005).

This is not to suggest that unions are a monolithic whole without their own substantial cleavages. Indeed, within the AFL-CIO, the CLC, and even BC's own BC Federation of Labour and Vancouver and District Labour Council one need not look far to find examples of stereotypical 'union bosses', highly-critical activists associated with the labour left, representatives of various community organizations and everything in between. And different unions, too, are characterized by profoundly different approaches to everything from internal democracy to organizing strategies. The point is that *despite* these

differences there is a founding myth of class identity, a deep-seated investment in Keynesian-style partnership and an organizational commonality to unions in general that substantially impacts their role vis a vis both employers and members. And it is not clear that an organization formed on a fundamentally different basis would have anything substantial in common with 'the union' as we know it⁸⁸.

Recognition of all this is not just an academic exercise; it has enormous implications for working class organization as well. First, and most importantly, an acknowledgement of the fundamental disjuncture between the trade union organization and the contemporary composition of the broadly-defined working class challenges the continued relevance of unions, not just for those on the right eager to re-assert capital's unfettered ability to command, but also for those on the left who would participate in the creation of a new workers' movement grounded in the real material, cultural, and political conditions of post-Keynesian globalized capitalism. That is, regardless of general aims or overarching objectives that may or may not continue to motivate workers' struggle, is there any reason the dominant trade union form should be considered anything other than a specific organizational response to a specific set of economic, political and cultural circumstances? Is there any reason to assume that the general form of workers' organization should be considered timeless when it is clear that the composition of the working class is not? Is there reason to assume that an organization created in, by, and for a particular political-economic arrangement

⁸⁸ For work on the substantial distinctions within and among North American unions, see Babson, 1999; Briskin and McDermott, 1993; Cunnison and Stageman, 1996; Gapasin and Yates, 2005; Heron, 1989; Johnson, 2000; Leier, 1995; Lynd, 1996; or Palmer, 1983.

could maintain its effectiveness when virtually all the conditions of its formation and reproduction have been undone – not only its rules of operation and its political privilege, but the very core of its membership (i.e. the urban industrial proletariat), its most critical foundation? And though a defensive left has dismissed these questions out of hand as ideological mystification by the theoreticians of capital, and though there is certainly ample evidence that such mystification has been produced *ad nauseam*, it is nonetheless imperative that activists and analysts of anti-capitalism consider such questions seriously as part of their ongoing strategic and organizational work. Indeed, some have already done so – though these contributions are too often invisible or deemed marginal to those of us (scholars and unionists alike) used to seeing trade unions and left political parties as the primary forms of radical organization⁸⁹.

It is notable that even those on the left, those who consider themselves critics of the typical North American style trade unionism of the past decades, are reluctant to extend their critique to the union in general. Stinson and Richmond, for example, locate continued antagonisms of gender and class within the labour movement in a “‘business unionism’ - hierarchical, authoritarian, and non-inclusive” which is resistant to mobilization from within, defensive in the face of criticism from its own ranks, which “does not value and involve those at the ‘lower end’” (1993: 140). I certainly would not suggest that their concerns are misplaced, or too sharp. Rather, the problem with this framework is it presumes a substantial qualitative difference between ‘business unionism’ and trade unionism more generally; I would suggest, to the contrary, that the basic

⁸⁹ See, for example, Finnamore, 2004, and Fletcher, 2005.

structural characterizations applied to business unionism apply equally to the most activist and progressive of contemporary North American labour, and that these arise precisely from the form and structure of the contemporary union as a formal organization modeled on, and partnered with, the state. Certainly business unionism, Gomperism, and union gangsterism represent the worst of labour's historical record, not only masking but deepening privilege, brutally attacking civil rights, feminist, and other labour organizers, offering support to imperialist military, political and cultural initiatives; and certainly, too, defenders of this record remain entrenched in a significant number of contemporary labour organizations. But what is lost when these themselves are identified as the problem, full stop, is the fact that what we call business unionism represents only the most explicit of more general and widespread tendencies, only the 'ideal-type' of a model which continues to drive the labour movement - its more progressive as well as its most reactionary incarnations.

After seventy-five years of organizational development geared precisely towards partnership, the trade union as organization cannot be assumed to have anything whatsoever in common with a post-Keynesian, post-Cold War, global working class. On the contrary, the contemporary North American labour movement has been designed and built to participate in boardroom planning sessions, and cannot *not* continue to seek this role, whether in the CLC's attempt to distance itself from anti-free trade activists or the AFL-CIO's bid for partner status in the occupation of Iraq and – frighteningly reminiscent of the Cold War - the destabilization of Venezuela (Buhle, 2005; Scipes, 2005). And if many

decades ago there were any justification for the narrow and self-serving notion of 'working class' on which official labour was built; and if many decades ago the statist model of organization made some logical sense; and if many decades ago the strategy of tripartism managed to win some very significant gains – even if all these were true, the last thirty years have taken us somewhere else entirely, where new strategies and new methods of organizing are demanded.

And the Working Class After the Trade Union:

While the mainstream labour movement has been in retreat for the past two decades, a dynamism has emerged in sectors long overlooked or deemed outside of or secondary to the class struggle. A wave of anarchist activity, particularly among youth, has re-kindled the 'drop-out' sensibility associated with the post-Yippie period of the early 1970s, now interwoven with a fairly sophisticated analysis of how small-scale actions and lifestyle resistances can hearken alternative relationships not only outside of capital but outside, too, of the organizational left. In Western Europe, the UK's Reclaim the Streets, Italy's social centres and a diverse network of 'temporary autonomous zones' seek to combine community-building and resistance by an emphasis on reclamation of public space and event-specific organization (McDonald, 2006). In Canada advocates of 'direct-action' from the resurgent-IWW, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, and Montreal's No One Is Illegal emphasize fiercely anti-capitalist strategies for day to day, often individual-specific confrontations, helping to establish a culture of *winning* (Day, 2005). From specific grievances

against, for example, Monsanto in India or Shell in Nigeria, struggles of indigenous peoples, squatters, home-workers, anti-globalization activists and "Third World" women (in both the North and the South) have exploded in recent years, not simply on an issue-specific basis, but as efforts to resist the central thrust of neoliberal restructuring (Herrera, 2006; Navarro, 2006) - its attack on the remaining commons, be that defined as geographic, political, economic or cultural space.

The forms and strategies of struggle associated with these diverse movements have been analyzed extensively, particularly by post-structuralist and feminist scholars (Chhechhi and Pittin, 1996; Freeman, 2000; Mies, 1986; Mitter, 1994) but remain marginal in treatments of traditional 'working class' movements, such as trade unions. The question, then, is whether and how these struggles can be linked, how new working class movements can take shape *beyond* the traditional organizational models, if and how the present diversity of rebellions can be considered not as competitors or even strategic allies, but different trajectories of the same movement, broadly-understood - a movement against commodification of human relationships, against the unending intensification and expansion of work, against the corporatization of public space, from parks and community centres to ideas and seeds, against the submission of democratic governance to economic imperative, and against the barrage of intellectual warfare which insists 'there is no alternative' to the logic of the market.

And When the Party's Over:

In 1992, at the peak of the retreat from class, Eduardo Galeano wrote of socialism's death: "I must confess, I don't believe it. This funeral is for the wrong corpse" (Galeano, 1992: 273). And he must have been onto something.

Class struggle has a way of catching you by surprise. Who would have imagined, ten or even five years ago, that today Latin America would be embroiled in a revolutionary fervor as far-reaching as ever before, Cuba would be rehabilitated on significant boards of the world stage, and popular uprisings in several different countries of the Middle East would put front and center the age-old question of conquest and empire? And yet today that is precisely what has happened.

In Iraq, American and British troops have been unable to secure order after nearly four years in the attempt, facing a popular resistance whose organizational roots are as diverse as the Ba'ath Party of Saddam Hussein, nationalists from Sunni, Shi'ite and Kurdish communities, fundamentalists in the vein of Al Qaida, and the Workers' Communist Party of Iraq – that is, the widespread guerilla warfare emerges from the full range of Iraqi communities and regional political movements. The resistance movement is only one part of more generalized regional rebellion; though typically it is the voices of the right that seek to frame this as a 'clash of civilizations'⁹⁰, between the forces of modern liberal democracy and those of a backward fundamentalism, it's fair to say that in one critical respect they are correct – throughout the region, popular uprising articulates a clear and unambiguous opposition to the core values associated

⁹⁰ See, for example, Samuel Huntington's 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations*.

with the West in general, and the values of political-economic globalization in particular (McDonald, 2006). This is not to downplay the geopolitical and resource issues, but rather to note that those become framed, on both sides, as issues of values and culture; this does nothing, however, to weaken the class content of the crisis.

In Lebanon, for example, a protest movement called by Hezbollah in December 2006 to topple the pro-US government has developed into something larger and more far-reaching – a predominantly poor and working class revolt in which cafés and shops, homes and restaurants of the wealthy have been occupied and re-invented as spaces of public gathering. Writing in *The Nation*, Mohammed Bazzi notes that it is as much neoliberal policy as Israeli bombings that have lit the spark; indeed, Hezbollah has been required to form coalitions with other parties and re-frame the rebellion accordingly as a war originating "from the homes of the poor, from the shantytowns, from the tents, from the demolished buildings, from the neighborhoods of those displaced by war..." (Bazzi, 2007).

Perhaps most significant, though, is the struggle for Israel/ Palestine, a struggle which is rapidly emerging as the fundamental fault-line for political class alliances across the globe. Though long considered an apartheid regime by southern African revolutionary movements and that region's left more generally, it is only in recent years that the Israeli state has been framed thus in the Americas and Europe, profoundly destabilizing old alliances and – particularly in the wake of 9-11 – bringing nationalist, class and anti-imperialist struggles together again

to face not only the Israeli state but a key pillar of US foreign policy, the full brunt of the 'war on terror', and the UK, whose struggle for financial control of the EU appears to be at stake, not to mention another opportunity to re-live the glory days of empire. The Israeli fault-line has been particularly significant for the global left in recent years, many – from ex-Trot Christopher Hitchens to BC's own writer and ecologist Terry Glavin – breaking with former comrades to form new alliances on the centre and right of the political spectrum while trade unions fiercely debate the applicability of the term 'apartheid' and consequent calls for divestment.

While the struggles in the Mid-East dominate mainstream discourse, half a world away swells another rebellion of more expressly 'class' significance. In the space of a few short years, Latin America has been engulfed in a resurgence of socialist revolt for the first time since the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas. Certainly, Brazil, Chile and Nicaragua have their socialists-turned-social democrats. But the real action is elsewhere. In Ecuador, Rafael Correa swept to power following a year of mass protests that unseated his predecessor and demanded a meaningful reversal of neoliberal policy-making. Only weeks into his presidency, already that country's Congress – dominated by established parties opposed to Correa's fledgling movement – has refused to enact the legislation he's brought forward to pull back on debt-servicing, oust the US military presence in the country and establish a new constitutional assembly.

Ecuador's experience follows on the heels of a similar process in Bolivia, in which the formerly insurrectionary Movimiento a Socialismo (Movement

Towards Socialism) was elected – also following mass street protests that had earlier unseated the ruling president - on a platform of sweeping land reform (by now enacted in legislation, if not in practice) which explicitly sought to throw its lot with Fidel Castro and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. But it is this last name that has sparked the greatest interest on the left, and the greatest consternation in the halls of capital. Chávez, populist former army officer and sharp critic of the neoliberal juggernaut which swept Latin America over the past couple of decades, first came to power in 1998 and has energized the region with what he calls *the Bolivarian revolution*; neither socialist, in the command sense we are used to, nor social democratic, *bolivarianismo* combines a leadership elected through standard procedures of liberal democracy with the populist approach that has characterized charismatic leaders of both the right and left in Latin America. For example, allied municipal governments work with non-governmental organizations in each community to take on significant state tasks, from the establishment of community kitchens to the formation of literacy brigades and health clinics, and the mass protest movements remain mobilized for day to day political work and to take to the streets should it be necessary to threaten once again the more insurrectionary avenue that might open up should their Chávez be ousted (Lebowitz, 2006).

Venezuela is a fascinating case; by no means an easily-replicated model, the country is uniquely poised to challenge the US given its oil wealth, and the populism of its president not something that can be copied at will. It has, however, spawned in the region a renewal of the radical left, a resurgence of the

language of revolution, and certain key policy features which distinguish it from either the old left of state socialism or the new 'leftishness' of social democracy. Rhetorically, certainly, this breed of elected politician – in Ecuador and Bolivia no less than Venezuela – explicitly credits mass revolt and protest with the rise to governance, establishing a mid-way point between the Party apparatus of command socialism and the parliamentarism of social democrats. Back with a vengeance is the language of capital and class, of neoliberalism and socialism, of imperialism and revolution. And back, too, are key features of the Third World revolution – land reform, literacy brigades, community health workers, and a healthy dose of reverence for the old man himself, Fidel. And yet there are profound differences, too, from either the Party model or Ché's guerilla warfare approach. Most notably, nowhere in the new socialist project has full-scale nationalization appeared; nowhere has political power been centralized in a single organization on anything even resembling the Party scale. Rather, the watchwords here are mutual aid, international solidarity and experimentation – watchwords traditionally associated with movements rather than states, oppositions rather than orders.

Where this all leads is too early to tell; even Venezuela remains in a fairly early stage of its announced process, and has over the past several months begun to adopt the language of traditional socialism – including explicit references to Lenin – and to take tentative steps towards both Party formation and state-enterprise (Munckton, 2007). It is, then, unclear at this stage to what extent the old models might be revived. But what, ultimately, these new socialist

states do is secondary. What is most significant is that they signal a vibrancy and a life on the left that we haven't seen for some time; one which grounds itself in the history of Latin American socialism, while articulating something profoundly contemporary; one that speaks of imperialism and capital as breathing dragons to be fought rather than realities to be accommodated; one that – whether ultimately successful or not – attempts to mediate the democracy/ revolution tension in a new way.

WORKERS AND UNIONS, 1999-2000

IN 1999, I AM VICE-PRESIDENT AND COUNSELOR OF LOCAL 23 OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS WORKERS UNION. THE EMPLOYER, BC TEL, HAS RECENTLY MERGED WITH AND TAKEN THE NAME OF THE PUBLICLY-REGULATED TELEPHONE COMPANY IN ALBERTA, TELUS. A MASSIVE RESTRUCTURING PROGRAM IS UNDERWAY IN THE WORKPLACE, THOUGH IT IS NEVER NAMED AS SUCH. THE COMPANY AGGRESSIVELY UNDERMINES COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT PROVISIONS, AND AVOIDS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE INTERACTIONS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNION. THE UNION, FOR ITS PART, IS OVERWHELMED. UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO ADJUST TO THE NEW CORPORATE REGIME, UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO RECOGNIZE THAT ITS PRIVILEGED POSITION, ITS CONSULTATIVE, LARGELY COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EMPLOYER HAS BEEN UNILATERALLY REVOKED. THE UNION IS IN CRISIS.

MEMBERS ARE ANGRY. IN MY OWN LOCAL, THREE MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL EXECUTIVE PURSUE LEGAL ACTION AGAINST THE UNION OFFICE, ALLEGING THE ORGANIZATION IS EITHER UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO FULFILL ITS MANDATE. MEMBERS FEEL ABANDONED. OFFICIALS FEEL ATTACKED ON ALL SIDES. PARALYSIS SETS IN AT THE ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL. RESENTMENT GROWS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, CULMINATING EVENTUALLY IN AN ILLEGAL WORK STOPPAGE WHICH IS ORGANIZED ENTIRELY LOCALLY, AGAINST THE ADVICE OF THE UNION ADMINISTRATION, AND WHICH AT ITS PEAK AFFECTS HALF THE TELEPHONE COMPANY'S OPERATIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

THE JOB ACTION ENDS AFTER A WEEK, WHEN UNION OFFICERS MEET WITH MANAGEMENT TO BROKER A DEAL; I AM ALLOWED TO SIT IN AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE STRIKERS, BUT HAVE NO VOICE AT THE TABLE. THE UNION OPENS WITH A PLEA FOR PARTNERSHIP, NOTING A "THIRTY YEAR RELATIONSHIP". TELUS MANAGEMENT RESPONDS SIMPLY, "DON'T YOU GET IT YET? THOSE DAYS ARE OVER". AS THE MYTH OF KEYNES' RESURRECTION DIES AT THAT TABLE, THE UNION IS SILENT, DUMFOUNDED, AND DOES NOT RESPOND.

IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS, THE TWU'S STAFF, MEMBERS OF THE OFFICE AND TECHNICAL EMPLOYEES UNION LOCAL 15, ARE INVOLVED IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WITH THE TWU AND THE VANCOUVER AND DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL. THEIR PRIMARY ISSUES REVOLVE AROUND EQUITY – DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF STAFF APPOINTMENTS EARN DIFFERENT BENEFITS AND PENSION CONTRIBUTIONS, AND THE STAFF FEEL IT IS TIME FOR PARITY – IF NOT WITH THE TWU MEMBERS THEY WORK TO REPRESENT, AT VERY LEAST WITH ONE ANOTHER. THE TWU REFUSES. THE STAFF STRIKE, TAKING WITH THEM INTO JOB ACTION OTHER OTEU 15 MEMBERS AT NUMEROUS BC UNIONS. THE BC FEDERATION OF LABOUR'S ANNUAL CONVENTION IS CANCELLED. MY CO-WORKERS IN THE UNION LOCAL ARE DUMFOUNDED. THEIR UNION, PARALYZED BY THE POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING OF THE EMPLOYER, NOW APPEARS UNABLE EVEN TO KEEP ITS OFFICES OPEN. IT ATTACKS ITS STAFF – WITH WHOM WE WORK CLOSELY – AS TRAITORS AND INGRATES. AND, MANY FEEL, IT ATTACKS ITS MEMBERS, BY SUGGESTING THAT IF THE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE HAS BROKEN DOWN IN THE WORKPLACE, PERHAPS THE REASON IS THAT TOO MANY WORKERS ARE FILING TOO MANY GRIEVANCES.

AT THIS TIME, IN MY OTHER LIFE, I AM FINISHING THE COURSE-WORK PORTION OF MY PHD PROGRAM. TERM IS COMING TO AN END. I HAVE BEEN OVERWHELMED BY MY UNION WORK. I HAVE NOT BEGUN TO WRITE MY COURSE PROJECT — A RESEARCH PROPOSAL. I SIT AT THE COMPUTER LATE ONE NIGHT, TO FORCE MYSELF TO GET SOMETHING ON PAPER. AS I BEGIN, I FIND I HAVE LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT THE COURSE MATERIAL, BUT A GREAT DEAL TO SAY ABOUT THE TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS ENGULFING MY UNION. FROM THOSE RAVINGS, A RESEARCH PROPOSAL IS FASHIONED. FROM THAT PROPOSAL, A PROJECT EMERGES. AND MUCH LATER, AFTER HALF A DOZEN WRITTEN VERSIONS AND INFINITELY MORE IN MY MIND, AFTER SEVERAL ARTICLES AND ENDLESS DEBATES ABOUT WHY I'M BOTHERING WITH SCHOOLING, AND WHY ANY OF THIS COULD POSSIBLY MATTER, A CONVERSATION AT A PARTY STARTS A NEW PROCESS, WHERE AUTOBIOGRAPHY, ACADEMIC LITERATURE, POLITICS AND THE REALITIES OF WORKING LIFE COME TOGETHER.

*There will be no drinking, no bad language,
no slacking, no unofficial tea breaks,
no wandering in and out at any old hour.
We'll carry on working just as if the bosses were still here.*

Jimmy Reid, shop-steward, *Upper Clyde Shipbuilders "work-in"*, 1971, p. 8

*This is a disciplined orderly law-abiding picket.
All joining this picket are obliged:
Not to talk while singing, slogans and speeches are in process
and to join with a full heart into the spirit of the picket.
Do not leave the picket without informing security.
You must sign the attendance register.
Respond instantly to any request made to you by a steward.
City of London Anti-Apartheid Group have decided to request anyone
not obeying these rules to leave the picket.*

Rules for an anti-apartheid rally, London, cited in
Spectacular Times, Bigger Cages, Longer Chains, p. 29

*They called themselves communists, but they
shoot at poor farmers.*

Taxi driver in Kolkata, on the March 2007 killing of 14 people - demonstrating
against the creation of a 'free trade industrial hub' – by police in
communist-run West Bengal

*That's the problem with staff unions. They are not
committed to limiting their gains; the interests of
the organization are not their interests.*

Union Executive Member (Interview 9)

Chapter 12

Plurality and Class:

a situation-based conception

I work and live in the left. And as we celebrate these new resistances as signs that 'our' working class is no longer dormant, I am repeatedly struck by the tenaciousness of the old debates. Certainly the ideas played with in the preceding chapters are not new. No, if the crisis of 1968-1973 did one thing for the left, it made us adept at identifying our theoretical and analytical weakness. However, that self-awareness has not displaced our original theoretical inheritance, and the old debates continue to rage whenever we move towards practice. For those still coming from a Marxist tradition, there is a curious schism between a guilty acknowledgement of past exclusions and a lingering inability to do more than add in gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality as oppressions that complicate the political and ideological landscape. For those coming out of social-democratic or trade union traditions, there is simply paralysis – one adopts wholesale the Third Way of British Labour or rails in vain for the return of compassionate capitalism and hopes that unions might be invigorated by a renewed emphasis on organizing and increased coalition-building with community networks.

We are still, then, in crisis, organizationally as well as analytically, attempting to recycle old theories of class formation or to construct new ones that avoid reference to the fundamental location of class – production for and

management by capital – hoping this will resolve the problem. We do this in a number of ways:

- 1) recycling Althusser's over-determination to simply stress many oppressions without interrogating the relationships between and within them, and ultimately returning to class as a fixed economic category;
- 2) recycling post-Marxism in various ways: limit the application of *class* as productive relation to analysis of workplace disputes, toss a distributive model in and stir while intoning apologies for Marx's reductionism, which we accepted so uncritically;
- 3) defining class by consciousness or identity or displacing it with another category or set of categories (typically race/gender/sexuality) that appears more culturally meaningful – and is certainly more socially acceptable – in the present.

While these approaches are repeatedly trotted out, the political left moves along, the old debates that started this thesis resurfacing again and again. In the last few months, as I've edited, re-organized and grappled with these pages, three debates have found their way into my email box, all relevant to what's written here, and all taking me back to immediate politics, to real struggles that continue and real organizations and states which figure prominently in those struggles.

In the first, debate erupts over the Iraqi resistance, as assorted leftists and anti-war activists ponder what public statement to make in the wake of car-bombs in Baghdad – the real issue at hand, whether attacks on the occupying army constitute a

working class in resistance or a retrograde Islamic fundamentalism. The vast majority choose a side and fire barbs at one another; a few suggest it does not matter, it is resistance; a very few are offended that North Americans and Western Europeans even consider this their question to answer; not a single voice suggests it might be both. The debate rages and quiets, unsettled; half a century after C.L.R. James broke with Trotsky over a very similar question – whether U.S. black nationalism and worldwide anti-colonialism were class struggles or not – the working class remains undefined, and would-be organic intellectuals are tense.

In the second collection of text⁹¹, Michael Lebowitz and John Holloway spar over the process called the Bolivarian Revolution which has focused all eyes on Venezuela and sparked a resurgence of socialist debate. Holloway announces a visit to Caracas, and promises upon his return a full airing of his views. Lebowitz is incensed at the reservation of judgment – one is with the revolution or against it, there is no middle, there is no 'wait and see'. Regardless of its intentions, the anarchist camp effectively supports the counter-revolution, he argues, its research and analysis providing fuel for the right, and weakening the popular front. Holloway fires back with horror-stories from revolutions gone bad, and numerous questions about the personal working class credentials of the Venezuelan revolutionary brass. For days they volley back and forth over the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the over-arching questions: Socialism – good or bad? Anarchism – principled opposition or cop-out? Left criticism of avowedly socialist states – good class analysis or counter-revolution?

Lastly, Vancouver's Solidarity Notes labour choir cancels shows and practices over a split on the issue of union staffers. The BC Government and Service Employees

⁹¹ <http://www.ricardo.ecn.wfn.edu/~cottrell/OPE/archive/0505/0056.html>

Union is behind picket lines, its professional staff on strike. A number of choir members – primarily, it is worth noting, those who work for unions - suggest a trip to the picket line to sing in solidarity. And the fight is on:

- union staff should not have the right to strike; they work for the class and have no separate interest;
- who is the class if not every worker?
- in this time, under this government, in the face of an aggressive capitalist strategy, to do such harm to a union is profoundly irresponsible;
- if unions cannot treat their employees well, they are unworthy of the name;
- these union staff are self-interested; who could expect anything else from the professional porkchoppers who have hijacked the labour movement;
- and so on and so on.

Eventually, the BCGEU strike settles, the debate ebbs yet again. The choir is back in the solidarity business.

I recall similar arguments a few years ago, leaping into the fray and furiously defending one side; now I'm just tired of it, and instead read the arguments for the contradictions and commonalities. And here, I think, is where all the strands of reflection, analysis, and history in these pages come together – in a melding of the structural with the personal; in a stress on the *relationships* of order and resistance; in a class analysis rooted in many and varied day to day

interactions, and the accumulated weight of these relationships in what we call 'structure', what we remember as history, and what we live as politics. These debates speak to precisely what I've been thinking about, and bring me back to the thread that links it together.

If, as Marx recognized, class is a relationship, we can only do class analysis and make class struggle by doing and making new relationships;

And if, as critical poststructuralists uncovered, social structure is the accumulation (and real tangible, forceful defense) of certain relationships until they become 'common sense' and the marginalization of others until they become pathological or idealist or both;

And if histories of politics and economies and cultures are the histories of these relationships in ongoing contestation:

then we need to re-emphasize class as an ever-present tension rather than a fixed location or identity; we need to look for resistance and promise in dynamics of resistance rather than ideological formulations or position-papers; and we simply cannot begin any alternative project with preconceptions of a new order, or even taking for granted existing organizations – for these always already privilege ends over means, i.e. accumulated relationships over the constitutive relationships themselves. Rather, we can only begin with the *means* of resistance, with specific relationships and specific questions about them.

Consider: it is one thing to ask, "Is Cuba socialist?", "Does the trade union represent working class interests?", or – something entirely different but raising the same issues - "Is Pride Day a working class celebration?" Such questions presuppose a permanent wedding of identities and interests, and presuppose, too, that structures are coherent wholes, without contradiction. It is altogether different to inquire: "In this scenario, where is the push for order, exchange-value and work, and where are the demands for freedom, use-value and leisure". This is a different question, which may indeed be answered differently depending on the context:

- is the question of Cuba's socialism asked in regard to U.S. aggression, joint ventures with transnational corporations, attempts by cigar-factory workers to win the right to strike, or demands by families for increased monthly rations?
- is the trade union in question, and at this moment, locking out its staff, enforcing discipline after an illegal work stoppage, or organizing a work to rule?
- does the question of Pride celebrations arise in the context of a growing corporate sponsorship, and development of guidelines to ensure float displays are advertiser-friendly? Or is the debate engaged with attempts to block recognition of same-sex partnerships with all the attendant implications for the right to fuck, adoption and child-rearing, and pension and sick benefits?

- or – and more likely - in each example, are there several contextual considerations, and does the answer necessarily need to be the same for each?

The context and target of the question is everything. And here the lessons of queer theory and the autonomist tradition become so critical – our class relationships are plural as our lives are plural: not because class itself is plural or any less relevant, not because production is any less central or work any less exploitative, but rather because class, gender, race and sexuality form a maze of accumulated power relationships we all negotiate daily. A single person may occupy different class positions various times in a single day, not because class is meaningless or class is plural but because relationships are plural and lives are plural - and as far as class, race, gender and other analytical/ political categories are concerned it is the relationship that matters, not the person who occupies that relationship.

Likewise class struggle — if capital is a relation, and class struggle the process by which that relation is put under pressure, then neither the actors nor their ideology is particularly important in the final analysis. Let's consider a couple of examples, staying with the union/ Party thread we've followed thus far, and the two questions that preoccupied me during my doctoral and MA work respectively: the class location of the union employer, and the class location of the socialist state.

Playing Both Sides: when workers' organizations manage workers' staff

In 1951 eighteen workers employed by the US Air Line Pilots' Association (ALPA) embarked upon an organizing drive – for the first time in North America, staff employed by a trade union sought to unionize themselves. In a challenge to the National Labor Relations Board, the employing union presented several arguments against the right of its staff to unionize. First, ALPA suggested that all of its staff should be seen as managers, as they dealt with confidential membership information, and therefore should be legally-barred from unionization; second, the union argued that its status as a union necessarily differentiated it from an 'employer' as that term was defined legally, and therefore the right to organize did not extend to employees of unions; finally, after losing both decisions, ALPA sought instead to divide its staff, and argued that its employees must be required to organize along craft, rather than industrial lines. On this point, the NLRB agreed, certifying two distinct bargaining units for ALPA's professional and clerical staff (Stamm, 1969: 21-25).

For the first time, a union had been declared an employer, and was legally recognized as playing two class roles simultaneously; the significance of the decision was not lost either on employing unions or union staff – and neither did it pass un-noticed in the public. Shortly after the NLRB issued its ruling, an article appeared in the *New York Times* entitled, "Union as Employer"; the *Times* piece identified the decision as one likely to have enormous significance for the union

movement, and indicated that something had dramatically changed in the way unions should be understood politically, economically, and socially:

The increase in number, variety and complexity of issues has subordinated the local union and has compelled the national unions to engage experts, technicians and professional employees, and the union structures have tended to fit their new functions. Nobody can see how far this development may go... (*New York Times*, Jan 15, 1952)

But if no one could predict exactly the impact of such professionalization, and unions' considerable shift from social movement to institution, the unions themselves, and the workers they employed, clearly did recognize one thing: class relations did operate within workers' organizations, and – having now been legally-recognized - class interests were unlikely to go unspoken.

The Board's decision in the ALPA case had a major impact throughout the organized labour movement. Within a few years, many of the largest international unions were confronted with staff union drives – the Teamsters, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the International Association of Machinists, to name only a few. By 1961, the AFL-CIO leadership was actively and publicly engaged in the battle, bringing its significant resources to bear in the dispute and seeking to end the trend towards unionization of labour staffers. Staff who sought certification were vilified for promoting factionalism, for seeking to undermine the growing strength of the workers' movement, and for promoting that most evil of evils – communism (Stamm, 1969: 104). The message was loud and clear – staff either submit their interests to the good of the union, or they actively undermine the union, serving instead the interests of corporate America, of Bolshevism, or

of both. A statement by ILGWU President David Dubinsky represents well the attitude of union employers:

...we have always had a concept of the union leader as a leader of masses and not as a paid mercenary or as one engaged in a business for self-aggrandizement. I spent time in a Czarist jail because I was part of a struggle to free people, not because I was paid to agitate. The founders of the ILGWU starved themselves into sickness and death, faced beatings and crippling, gangsters and prisons because they felt that this was their responsibility to their consciences and to their fellow workers... We chose to stay with the labor movement not because it paid better, not because it offered more security, not because it offered greater leisure, but because it was our dedication, our struggle, our belief – our very lives. What a bitter joke that we are now characterized as 'management'... (Dubinsky, 1961, cited in Stamm, 1969: 128-134).

Dubinsky went on at length, lamenting the 'spirit of materialism' which had pervaded union staff, and intimating that it was in fact staff unionization that caused the bureaucratization of labour organizations; staff insistence on higher wages and benefits created a "class of super-citizens" within the union, and their articulation of class interests made the union a 'business' rather than a 'movement' (Ibid.)⁹².

⁹² Union staff can be divided into two major groups – professional workers and clerical workers. Clerical staff typically enjoy greater protections and more recourse to grievance procedures, precisely because they are – in their composition and their work – virtually indistinguishable from clerical workers in any business. Their work tends to be governed by consistent rules, rather than the flexible and personal relations which apply to most professional staff.

Professional staff, by contrast, are less frequently organized in unions of their own, and have a more ambiguous class relationship with the organization. In many cases, they enter the labour movement as elected officials who are then able to use their skills and/ or political leverage to transform themselves into professional unionists; at other times they are specialists or experienced political movers hired because they are deemed to have a greater grasp of the legal maneuvering, public relations ploys, and culture of the industrial relations system.

But most significant for our purposes is the impact of these differences upon identity. Clerical workers by and large identify 'the union' with the one they belong to, rather than the one they work for (Interview 5). Professional staff, on the other hand, describe an intense identity-crisis: "Who do I work for? Who do I represent?" To a great extent, these employees identify the term

Dubinsky's arguments are echoed today whenever unions are confronted with their employer status – and most noticeably in times of labour unrest. The TWU staff strike in 1999; numerous job actions by BCTF staff, clerical and professional; pickets by employees of the Canadian Labour Congress and the BC Government and Services Employees Union in 2004 and 2005; and in 2007 a strike of staff employed by United Food and Commercial Workers local 832 in Winnipeg – in each case, the debate arose again, and in each case a significant part of the left rose to defend the boundaries of the working class from encroachment. The TWU Executive went through various responses – initially declaring, "We're the employer in this situation and we intend to behave like an employer" (TWU Executive member to Local 23 General Meeting), later recanting and hiring an Executive Director precisely because "we don't want to be bosses" (TWU Executive member at Annual Convention, 2000) – as though establishing an intermediary could make the power relationship disappear. The BCTF, for its part, wrapped itself in the professional association flag, lamenting its staff's "old-style trade unionism" (Interview 4). And the CLC and BCGEU strikes each generated considerable debate among the left generally, the former inspiring hundreds of pages of vitriol on a left-wing electronic bulletin board (rabble.ca), the latter causing such a schism within BC's Solidarity Notes labour choir that practices were cancelled for the duration of the job action.

But equally significant is the internal conflict union staff express. "The 'good of the union' argument comes frequently from ourselves" notes one

"union" with the employer, and often "cringe at the impact" of their own demands upon the employer organization (Interview 8). Here is Dubinsky internalized, and he leaves deep scars.

grievance officer. "Once you become a staffperson you're not supposed to carry a flag anymore" (Interview 2). This "...struggle with self-censorship" (Stinson and Richmond, 1993: 138) arises from various sources: the fact that many staffers feel privileged to be paid to do what so many do for free – advocate for workers rights; that they are rewarded and promoted for work that in many other contexts would place one's job, or even one's life, in jeopardy; and that a career in activist circles can easily mean that a conflict in the workplace is experienced as personal betrayal on both sides, with far-reaching repercussions in staff's personal and emotional lives. As dedication to the cause and willingness to sacrifice compete with feeling "angry, hurt and frustrated" (Stinson and Richmond, 1993: 138), the result is frequently a kind of "schizophrenia" (LeStaff, 1999: 11), an identity-crisis which leaves professional union staff experiencing a collective as well as an individual fear of speaking that frustration, and a reluctance to advocate for themselves as workers.

The Class Politics of Class Politics:

The identity struggles of trade union professional staff are deeply felt personal dilemmas of those who perform this work; they are, however, symptomatic of a fundamental question for the trade union, or indeed any movement on the political left: how does one reconcile the practical realities of struggle in the here and now with criticism of one's own organization? For a union negotiator or grievance officer, the question is, "What union staffer, drowning in public antipathy to unions and lousy labour media coverage, has the stomach to expose the union as a bad employer?" (LeStaff, 1999: 11); more generally, and more

simply, it is the merging of two age-old debates on the left: (1) Does the employer-status of a working class organization imply something more about the class location of that organization? And, whether the answer be yes or no, (2) Where is the line between criticism and counter-revolution?

These questions suggest that it is not enough to simply identify points at which the union behaves as an employer. First, many union executive members are keenly aware of their employer role and the contradictions it may entail. Second, the union as a place of business is only a small part of the whole; workplace organizing, membership meetings, debates, elections, grievances, collective bargaining, job action – these are the bulk of the union's activities, and command the vast majority of any union executive's attention. If it is easy – though controversial – to identify the union's class location vis a vis its staff, then, the organization's class location in relation to its members and the employers it confronts is infinitely more complicated.

If the unionization of trade union staff did one thing, it indicated that something substantial had changed in the labour movement generally; the fact of professional staffing, the fact that internal industrial relations and organizational management had become part of the work of union executives, the fact that unions managed budgets, payrolls, investments – all this illustrated a dramatic change in the nature of the working class organization. No longer did the term 'union' imply a group of workers frustrated with conditions on the job, whose patience gives way to anger, exploding in strike action or slow-down. By the late 1950s, 'union' meant something altogether different – a formal organization that

collected dues, worked through the legal system and collective bargaining to increase wages and benefits, and represented working people according to the standards of liberal democracy. To be sure, unions continued to take job action, workers continued to organize informally, and the conditions which sparked unionization continued to exist; but the demographic, financial and political reach of the trade union had expanded drastically. Mass gatherings gave way to elections and board meetings, solidaristic donations were replaced by the dues check-off, direct action took a back-seat to legal wranglings; and at some point in the process, these incremental quantitative changes resulted in a qualitatively new and different trade union⁹³. This profound transformation went neither unnoticed nor uncriticized. As early as 1952 scholars were speaking of the union as an administrative structure, an enterprise, with internal labour management requirements and personnel policies like any other business (Belfer, 1952; Joseph, 1959; Stamm, 1969). And, as discussed previously, C.L.R. James was talking of unions as co-managers.

What matters, then, is not simply the day to day experience of union staff (though this clearly matters to staff themselves, and provided my own entry into the winding exploration which follows), nor the contradictory behaviours of union executives who play the employer role within their organizations, nor even the complex issues of identity and consciousness which arise. What is significant, most of all, about the staff-employer relationship is its illumination of the *class*

⁹³ In *The Dialectics of Nature*, Engels notes that a succession of quantitative changes eventually become qualitative. "Thus we see that the purely quantitative operation of division has a limit at which it becomes transformed into a qualitative difference" (Accessed at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/don/ch02.htm>)

location of the trade union, and the union's role as a *manager* of work. That is, the conflicts between staff and executive, and within and among staff themselves, indicate a fundamental tension between the union as industrial relations organization and the union as collectivity of workers, a deep-seated – perhaps even organic – cleavage in which immediate strategies of institutional survival so impact organizational behaviour that the very purpose of the organization's existence is re-written.

If Not Business Unionism, the Business of Unionism:

The natural question, then, and one which has been asked many times before, is this: is the union a vehicle for management of social, political, and economic relations? Or is it a vehicle for resistance to such management? The short answer, of course, is that it tries to be, and indeed is, both. Unions function as businesses in their relations with staff, as human resources managers in the administration of collective agreements, and as enforcers of labour discipline when faced with struggles of workers that step outside the boundaries of the law. But simultaneously unions continue to provide forums for workers to organize against capital, continue to press the boundaries of the labour-subsistence relationship, and do not infrequently step outside of their own industrial relations box by tacitly encouraging extra-legal mobilization where that mobilization promises to strengthen the organization's position at the bargaining table.

The more complex answer, however, is that in being both simultaneously worker and manager, the organization can ultimately be only the latter, as its

resistance is always-already intertwined with a new set of regulations, a new system of management, a new 'plan'. In other words, the problem is not that unions are too professional, too bureaucratic, nor even that unions are in league with management. Rather, unions *are* management. Unions are not victims of an industrial relations regime; they *are* an industrial relations regime. Imagine, then, what happens when the working class organization is elevated to state power.

Class Struggles in Socialist Cuba:

With the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Cuba lost 85 percent of its foreign trade, as well as its primary source of political and ideological support (Pérez-López, 1994; Preeg and Levine, 1993). Over the next decades, the country underwent a period of dramatic restructuring of its political and economic structures in order to safeguard specific achievements as the country moved into a new era, characterized by greater integration into the world economy and a significantly re-defined 'socialist future'⁹⁴. Cuba's reform process was officially announced in December 1986 as *The Campaign to Rectify Errors and Negative Tendencies*, or rectification process, later evolving into an economic state of emergency - the *special period in peacetime* - and reaching its culmination in 1991's 4th Communist Party Congress. And while some observers see the reform as representing a continuing adherence to the socialist project (del Aguila, 1993: 72; Ritter, 1993: 4), its policies blurred distinctions between capitalism and socialism as systems of accumulation.

⁹⁴ For more detailed discussion of class antagonism in the Cuban reform process, see Green, 1996.

Revolutionary discourse played a critical role in Cuba's reform, not only providing justifications for austerity, but also mobilizing active popular support, largely by assigning lower level functionaries responsibility for the crisis⁹⁵. This middle strata, it was argued, had allowed the state to overspend and had caused inefficiency to run rampant, jeopardizing the socialist project. And it was an easy target. Workers identified this group as 'the state', the functionaries who had for decades imposed labour discipline and political order, while top Party officials saw in the managers a significant power base articulating demands for political reform (Petras and Morley, 1992). By attacking this stratum, then, Castro was able to eliminate potential political enemies while drawing workers into the battle on his side, arguing that he and the working class alike had been betrayed by "hucksters" and "two-bit capitalists" (*Granma Weekly Review*; 18 Oct., 1987; Eckstein, 1994: 61).

Work and Wages – the class of Cuban reform:

While identifying middle management as the common enemy of state and worker, Cuba initiated a series of policies to cut social and individual wages and enforce profit-maximization as a revolutionary principle. Voluntary labour was stressed, as the government organized *minibrigadas* to carry out a variety of work programs. Unable to rely solely upon a communist work ethic to recruit

⁹⁵ Rectification's anti-bureaucratic campaign was principally directed against the *comprador* functionaries responsible for the state's 'middleman' activity, serving as intermediaries between productive sectors and negotiating Cuba's import and export business. The *compradores* were opposed by production-based technocrats who focused upon raising productivity through the traditional labour-state alliance. Renewed growth required the strengthening of Cuba's productive system, a task hindered by the speculative activity of the *compradores*. Hence the politics of rectification, in which the upper echelons of the Party sought to harness popular dissent for an internal purge of the state's financial functionaries (Petras and Morley, 1992: 19-20).

volunteers, however, the *minibrigadas* offered a system of wage bonuses and other material incentives on individual, collective, and piece-work bases⁹⁶. National labour laws were declared inapplicable to projects involving volunteer work, allowing the state to extract a maximum of work for a minimum of pay (*Granma International*, 5 May, 1991; Eckstein, 1994: 63).

While the brigade system offered improved subsistence in return for labour performed outside the protection of legislation, the state moved to undermine workers' gains in the formal economy. Arguing that workers had manipulated work rules to their own advantage – and characterizing such abuses as signals of a 'creeping capitalism' – workplaces were inspected for 'overpayment', and thousands forced to take pay-cuts in the name of a renewed 'socialist ethos' (*Granma Weekly Review*, 27 April, 1986; *Trabajadores*, May 1987). Work was deemed a revolutionary duty, austerity a socialist virtue, and any struggle which challenged either patently counter-revolutionary (Castro, 1988: 23-4).

Labour rights began to erode rapidly. Full employment came to an end as Cuba cut jobs – over 20,000 in 1988 alone – to 'rationalize' the labour market, the national unemployment rate rising to six percent and becoming a structural feature of the Cuban economy (Dilla Alfonso, 1994; Eckstein, 1994). A *multioficio* program was introduced to reduce 'rigidities' in the labour market by allowing management to use workers for different tasks, essentially collapsing two or

⁹⁶ The bonuses were as follows: (a) *prima* – an individual bonus based on surpassing work norms/quotas; (b) *premio* – a collective bonus paid to a work team, based on farm profit and political commitment, ie. participation in voluntary labour; (c) *normas* – a piece-rate system designed to boost productivity per worker.

more job categories into one. And in agriculture, state farms were reconfigured as *unidades básicas de producción cooperativas* (UBPCs), or basic units of cooperative production - some 2700 by 1995 (*Militant*, Jan 21, 1995). A UBPC averaged approximately 100 workers, who collectively owned the machinery and the harvest; land, however, remained in state hands and the co-op could only sell its produce to the state, at government-set prices. Wages, too, were untied from the state pay-scale, varying according to job type as well as productivity, a measure intended to establish a subsistence-based incentive to labour (ICAP, 1994). By privatizing the state farming system in this way, the government made considerable savings in administration and upkeep, and reduced the agricultural wage-bill by making the enterprises responsible for their own subsistence needs. But the state retained control over cooperative members as workers, indicating what could and could not be produced, establishing quotas, administering a monopoly on agricultural purchases⁹⁷, and setting the prices to be paid for agricultural commodities. In Cuba's privatization, then, the state renounced its responsibility for the subsistence needs of farm workers without giving up its ability to dictate the pace and value of labour.

Throughout the restructuring process, Cuba's official labour movement, the Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos (CTC), continued to offer its support to the austerity measures, even when workers' gains came under direct attack. Traditionally the role of the union has been to mediate between workers

⁹⁷ The state insisted that each farm produces its quota for sale to the state; some UBPCs (though not those engaged in sugar) could sell surplus produce on the private farmers' markets in urban centres.

and state in order to maintain their alliance; the CTC enforces state productive strategy at the level of the workplace while allowing for a degree of worker participation in which disputes are kept within the boundaries of the Party. The special period officially retained this method of managing class struggle, but the CTC was increasingly reduced to providing communication from the top down, demanding "discipline, efficiency and a new mentality" from Cuban workers (*Trabajadores*, Nov.15, 1993). Though the emphasis on productivity had always been a cornerstone of the CTC, the special period saw this 'hymn to business' (Dilla Alfonso, 1994: 50) dominate official discourse at all levels.

At precisely the same time, Cuba began to pursue formal relationships with international capital in the form of direct investment and joint ventures, with a particular focus on tourism. Investors were exempted from labour legislation in key areas, such as regulations on hiring and firing. The consumer goods market was ear-marked for tourism, and 'dollar-stores' filled their shelves with toiletries, clothing and other products unavailable in Cuban stores. Further agreements were signed in electronics, pharmaceuticals and petrochemicals, as the national Chamber of Commerce announced the Revolution was turning westward "to turn us into business executives" (*The Economist*, July 28, 1990: 32) Laws on foreign investment – which previously had allowed joint ventures only where the state retained at least 51 percent ownership and certain management rights, and where all production followed the country's pay-scale and labour legislation – underwent substantial alteration. And a special law was promulgated for the tourism industry, decreeing higher pay-scales for Cubans employed in that sector

but releasing management from the labour code and imposing a sector-specific dispute resolution process that expanded allowable discipline and ruled out normal channels of appeal (Pérez-López, 1994: 193). Cuba began to advertise its record of 'labour discipline' (Domínguez, 1994: 15), and to pass significant management rights into the hands of private capital.

Another critical shift came in mid-1992, when the country's constitution was amended to open real estate to foreign interests; by 1995 properties and houses in Cuba were being sold to foreign enterprises and individuals, despite a chronic shortage of housing available to citizens. More significant still was an amendment to protect "ownership of property by joint ventures, corporations and associations established in accord with domestic laws" (Article 23). As part of the same revision, Article 14, which established socialist ownership, was changed to include only 'fundamental' means of production, while a new article established provisions for privatization of state assets. A dramatic change had taken place.

The strategy worked; joint ventures between the state and foreign capital jumped from only twenty in December of 1990 to over 200 in a single year (Pérez-López, 1994: 207). By 1994, some six hundred foreign enterprises were operating in Cuba (*Business Tips*, March 1994), in sectors from nickel extraction to retail to biotechnology. *Zonas libres* (free zones) – each dedicated to a particular industry - were established in several ports, by which the state hoped to offset the impact of the ever-tightening U.S. blockade while simultaneously attracting investment, bringing new technologies into the country, re-training the workforce and opening new markets (*Business Tips*, Nov. 1995; *El Nuevo*

Herald, July 3, 1995). Unlike joint ventures elsewhere in Cuba, the free zones were opened to 100 percent foreign-owned enterprises, and wages and conditions based on 'competitive' global standards rather than local legislation.

While the above reforms undermined labour's political power in the workplace and deepened state dependence on private capital, subsistence entitlements – the cornerstone of Cuba's socialism – were lowered to further reduce direct costs. The basic wage, previously guaranteed to all workers, came under attack with the introduction of performance- and time-based wages in some sectors, and substantial reductions were made to the social wage, as subsidies were reduced or dropped altogether from a number of basic products, including some foods. Urban transportation fees were doubled, electricity costs raised by 30 percent, and supplies of milk, sugar, and oil reduced. While rations had provided for 95 percent of family subsistence levels in 1970, during the 1980s and 1990s the figure was reduced to approximately 25 percent, and basics such as soap, toothpaste and shampoo were eliminated altogether. While official discourse hearkened a return to the days of Ché Guevara's moral revolution, then, state policy broke with the most fundamental value established at that time – the separation of subsistence from work.

The cuts had a devastating impact upon Cuba's working people. The state was forced to organize temporary shelters as homelessness became an increasingly visible reality, particularly among the nation's seniors (Resik, 1996), and child begging rose sharply. In the case of the latter, while the state acknowledged poverty and social deterioration, the political response was to

criminalize the problem. Court hearings were held and fines levied against parents of children found begging, as official statements placed blame squarely upon the shoulders of the (often single-parent) family. Thus while official ideology continued to recognize declining living standards, state discourse maintained that economic hardship would be no excuse for criminal or anti-social behaviour, and focused blame upon individual working class families (Acosta, 1996).

But at the community level, Cuban women bore the brunt of restructuring, as the state shifted responsibility away from itself and back to the home. On a fiscal level, cuts to rations and subsidies reduced state spending and re-emphasized the subsistence-incentive to work. As well, the intensification of women's labour served to force women out of the formal workforce, 'rationalizing employment' by increasing the reserve pool of labour and driving wages down, while simultaneously facilitating mobilization of women and children for tasks ranging from production of soap and clothing to recycling and community gardening (Eckstein, 1994: 113). Constructed as 'community responsibility', such mobilization of women's work retained indirect production for the state just as it reinforced the unwaged status of domestic labour. With rations cut, services eliminated, and employment reduced, women picked up the slack, taking on reproductive roles previously assigned to the state, i.e. childcare and subsistence. Indeed, in many respects it was the work of women which allowed the state to negotiate the crisis so well (Lutjens, 1995: 117-8).

In many regards, then, Cuba's restructuring program addressed itself to the same immediate challenges and pursued the same goals as did neo-liberal

policy elsewhere: stable and sustainable accumulation of capital through austerity and increased labour flexibility. For the first time Castro traded his military uniform for a three-piece suit, and the country's 'competitive edge' became its selling point as Cuba began to advertise labour discipline, repatriation of capital and free trade as virtues of the Revolution (Pérez-López, 1994b: 194-5).

But the distinctiveness of Cuba's approach was that its capital-oriented restructuring was accompanied by a rhetorical emphasis on *anti-capitalism*; while the state praised capitalist methods on the world stage (*Granma Internacional*, May 1991), domestically it continued to insist upon adherence to Marxism-Leninism and the revolutionary project, presenting the austerity measures as revolutionary sacrifice. This dual face of state discourse was critical, mediating the hybrid of market and command policies. The Fourth Party Congress adopted a resolution attacking the 'excessive egalitarianism' of Cuban socialism which "had an anti-economic and anti-efficient connotation" (Batista, 1993; Cooper, 1994), while at precisely the same time, policy reforms helped re-orient the economy along lines more conducive to investment and growth. In 1993 Cuba signed the Final Document of GATT's Uruguay Round, and opened discussions with the International Monetary Fund regarding the process of transition from state socialism to market-led development (*Business Tips*, Oct. 1994).

Factory and State, Work is Still the Issue:

As both the trade union employer and Cuban state examples illustrate, typical class relationships may well emerge within what we understand to be working class political institutions. But as much as the leftist credentials of labour leaders and former guerrilla fighters can't save them from being subjected to the same kinds of class analysis we apply to more overtly capitalist enterprises, neither does the existence of class relations within workers' organizations negate the very real ways these organizations confront capital. Indeed, to argue such would be to make the same mistake as those Leninists and social democrats for whom class could be seen – and therefore contained or defeated – in its individual or group embodiments. Rather, if class is a social relation, a tension, a dynamic of struggle between use-value and exchange value, leisure and work, command and autonomy, then there can never be such thing as an individual, group, organization or Party that *is* working class. Rather, class dynamics can only be understood in their particular context, and the class locations of particular actors only defined by the *situation*⁹⁸, the relationship of different forces in a given contest.

The implication, too, is not to say that there is no utility whatever to organization, but rather to emphasize that organization is, as the Italian autonomists pointed out some decades ago, necessarily *strategic*, i.e., developed not for its own purposes but to achieve a specific end in a specific situation. An

⁹⁸ It should be noted that my use of the term 'situation' in related to class analysis is distinct from that contemplated by Weber, whose *Economy and Society* introduced the concept of class situation as a means of delineating the boundaries of a political class. For Weber, class situation is defined by a combination of economic power, status and life chances, and is used to mark identifiable groups that share similar circumstances. I use the term situation in a different way – to focus upon relationships between social actors in a specific conflict, irrespective of the class roles those actors might play in other contexts. For more on Weber's class analysis, see Wright, 2000.

organization, then, may provide an intention and a means to move in a given direction. Class struggle, on the other hand, is the process of real *movement*, and is not bound by intent.

Here, then, is the sticky part, that tension which repeatedly confronts the left – that the working class is a resistance, a troubling of order, and yet political class organization and struggle always involves strategic decision-making on the means of resistance and articulation of certain demands to the exclusion of others. That is, in resisting we organize, in organizing we set boundaries, in setting boundaries we replicate the initial tension, generating order and resistance. Marx grappled with the contradiction, never resolving it. Leninists resolved the contradiction by obliterating any distinction between the working class organization and the class as movement; social-democrats resolved the contradiction by limiting their socialism to that practicable within a Rousseauian social contract; Richard Day resolves the contradiction by retreat to smaller, achievable goals and a rejection of any organizational solution or imagined-revolution that might imply coercion of any sort. And for my part, I'm not satisfied with any of the above. I think, though, that this contradiction is a significant part of Marx' legacy, and an important one to confront – and for that project, there's only one place to start: Robert Michels.

UNION STAFFING AND TAKING STOCK

I AM A UNION STAFFER. I WORK FOR AN ORGANIZATION, RECOGNIZED UNDER A LEGAL CODE AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF WORKERS' INTERESTS. I AM A NEGOTIATOR, BARGAINING WITH MANAGEMENT TO WRITE JOINT AGREEMENTS. I AM AN ADVOCATE, CAMPAIGNING FOR IMPROVED WORKING CONDITIONS AND HIGHER WAGES. I AM A POLITICIAN, BROKERING DEALS, MANAGING POLITICAL SUPPORT, SELLING POLICY. I AM A COUNSELOR, OFFERING ADVICE AND SUPPORT, DRYING TEARS, REFERRING TO SPECIALISTS. AND I AM A UNIONIST, ARGUING WITH BOSSES, FIGHTING DISCIPLINE, SEEKING MORE MONEY FOR LESS WORK AGAINST MANAGERS WHO SEEK MORE WORK FOR LESS MONEY. BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT – I WORK; I HAVE A BOSS; AND MY JOB DEPENDS ON MY ABILITY TO SERVE THE INTERESTS OF THAT BOSS.

BUT I AM NOT, IN MY WORK-LIFE, PART OF A WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT. I AM NOT, IN MY WORK-LIFE, CHARGED WITH ORGANIZING WORKERS AGAINST CAPITAL. I SERVE AN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS REGIME, AND IN THAT RESPECT I AM AS ACCOUNTABLE TO THE MANAGEMENT I OSTENSIBLY OPPOSE AS I AM TO THE WORKERS I OSTENSIBLY REPRESENT. I WORK AS ONE SMALL PART OF A REGIME DESIGNED TO MAINTAIN, IF NOT INCREASE, PRODUCTIVITY, TO SATISFY WORKERS' IMMEDIATE AND SPECIFIC DEMANDS, AND TO DAMPEN THEIR LONG-TERM AND GENERAL ASPIRATIONS. I SERVE LABOUR PEACE, INDUSTRIAL CALM, LIBERAL SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

THIS DISSERTATION BEGAN AS A DEFENSE OF UNION STAFF AS WORKERS AGAINST A MACHINE CALLED 'THE UNION' WHICH CLAIMED TO REPRESENT WORKING PEOPLE WHILE ABUSING ITS OWN EMPLOYEES. IT BEGAN, TOO, WHILE I WAS A UNION ACTIVIST AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER, NOT A STAFFER. BUT AS MY WORK PROGRESSED, AND AS I FOUND MYSELF WORKING AS AN EMPLOYEE OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT, I FOUND, TOO, THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE THE UNION'S BEHAVIOUR AS MANAGER VIS A VIS ITS EMPLOYEES FROM ITS BEHAVIOUR AS MANAGER VIS A VIS ITS MEMBERS.

THAT IS, THE POWER DYNAMICS AT PLAY IN UNION STAFF/ UNION EXECUTIVE RELATIONS ARE MERELY AMPLIFICATIONS OF TENSIONS AT PLAY WITHIN THE UNION AS ORGANIZATION AND THE DYNAMIC POWER IT HARNESSÉS – THE CREATIVE POWER OF WORKERS AT WORK. AND WHAT BECAME CLEAR, TOO, WAS THAT I COULD NOT SIMPLY SEE UNION STAFFERS AS VICTIMS ANY MORE THAN I COULD SEE UNION MEMBERS AS VICTIMS. PROFESSIONAL STAFFERS HAVE SIGNIFICANT POWER – THEY ARE THE DRIVERS OF THE MACHINE, THOUGH THEY OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES CRUSHED BENEATH ITS WHEELS. THEY ARE AT ONCE THE MOST CRITICAL OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT, AND THE MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS CONTINUED OPERATION AS WILLING PARTNER IN THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS REGIME. STAFF, THEN, ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTING BECAUSE THEY EMBODY, LIKE NO ONE ELSE, ALL THE CONTRADICTIONS OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT. THEY HOLD SUCH TREMENDOUS ANALYTICAL PROMISE PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY ARE IN SUCH A UNIQUE POSITION TO REVEAL THAT THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES. AND YET – AS IN MY OWN CASE – UNION STAFFERS' LIVELIHOOD DEPENDS ON (GENUINE OR PHONY) LOYALTY TO THAT REGIME AND OUR ABILITY TO CONVINCE WORKERS TO GIVE THE MACHINE THEIR TRUST AS WELL. WE WALK A MAZE, AND THOUGH MANY OF US UNDERSTAND THAT THE ONLY WAY OUT IS THROUGH OR BENEATH THE WALLS, WE CONTINUE TO WALK, SEARCHING FOR A DOOR MARKED *EXIT*.

It is organization which gives birth to the domination of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization says oligarchy.

Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, p. 365

*When I voted, my equality tumbled into the ballot box with my ballot;
they disappeared together.*

Louis Veuillot, cited in Michels, *Political Parties*, p. 75

Thus the moment inevitably comes when neither the idealism and enthusiasm of the intellectuals, nor yet the goodwill with which the proletarians devote their free time on Sundays to the work of the party, suffice any longer to meet the requirements of the case. The provisional must then give place to the permanent, and dilettantism must yield to professionalism.

Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, p. 107

Chapter 13

Democracy Inaction:

Michels and the class politics of organization

Political processes within working class organizations have long been a matter of debate; indeed, the history of the labour-side class struggle is in many respects a history of competing processes, competing models, competing notions of democracy, governance, and membership. Virtually all of the debate regarding the post-Keynesian crisis of unions is debate over political structure – how to elect, how to consult, how to organize, how to reform. And the communist left has been rife with argument from its very beginnings to contemporary disputes regarding the tactics of anti-globalization protests.

But for all its history, scholarship on the structure and governance of workers' organizations generally falls into a few broad schools, the first of which arises from sociology, and takes as its starting point Max Weber, Robert Michels, or both. Writing around the turn of the century, Weber examined the new forms of governance which characterized both the modern nation-state and the capitalist enterprise, noting six characteristics which he determined collectively constitute the bureaucratic method:

1. division of responsibility and authority according to fixed jurisdiction and fixed regulations;
2. a "firmly-ordered system of super- and subordination" for assignation of tasks and evaluation of performance;
3. a documentary culture; that is, a reliance on written documents which have a life outside of and above the individuals involved;

4. specific skills and/ or technical expertise brought by participants and not shared by the population at large;
5. professional dedication, or full-time devotion of the organization's officers to its work;
6. a reliance upon "more or less stable, more or less exhaustive" rules that can be learned by anyone entering the organization or enterprise

(Weber, 1946: 196-244)

Weber analyzed bureaucracy both positively and negatively, noting that its inevitably anti-democratic tendencies could not be eradicated in any large-scale organization or society, and that the gains to be made in the areas of efficiency, legitimacy of authority, and the formalization/ routinization of decision-making compensated for the de-personalization of social relationships bureaucracy entailed.

After Weber, and up until the 1950s and the consolidation of Keynesianism's tripartite industrial relations regime, the most significant non-Marxist analysis held, quite simply, that both unions and Parties were bureaucratic, professional institutions because they quite properly should be. Selig Perlman's 1928 *Theory of the Labor Movement*, which dominated the field for thirty years, took for granted that liberal capitalism was the natural order of modern democracy and, therefore, that the appropriate and inevitable form of worker advocate was a professional organization, representing select workers, and working towards harmonious, cooperative labour relations for harmonious, cooperative productivity (Perlman, 1966 [1928]). A second group, working in the boom years of the 1950s and early 1960s, is represented by the renowned political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset, who inaugurated a new era of labour

studies, marked by studies of individual unions and exceptional leaders, and one which understood politics as no more than competition for office, and democracy as transference of formal authority via election. Here, as in Perlman's analysis, debates over democracy are emptied of any substance whatsoever: quiet, safe, and almost invisible rotations of leadership are the hallmark of the democratic organization; anything dynamic, rebellious, active - rank and file activism, workplace-driven campaigns, permanent organizing/ reorganizing of political struggles - was pre-emptorily dismissed as radical, subversive, inherently anti-democratic, and wholly unsuitable in the context of the modern workplace or the democratic nation-state (Lipset, Trow and Coleman, 1956).

But if these liberal and liberal-conservative schools equated 'union democracy' with professionalism, exclusion, and cosmetic passages of authority, many of those on the left offered little more. Marxist analyses were increasingly bound by a Leninist orthodoxy after the 1920s, and held that unions could only avoid falling into collaborationism if they were firmly controlled by the vanguard workers' party; economic struggle on its own engendered a 'trade union consciousness' which could not see past the immediate goal of higher wages to the real locus of power - the capitalist state. This position rapidly spread from the emergent Soviet state to the mainstream left throughout Europe and North America to the point that any alternative left critique was dismissed as either anarcho-syndicalism or class collaborationism, fiercely repressed, and marginalized. The result was a left analysis of the trade union that took one of two positions - or both somewhat contradictorily and simultaneously: trade

unions were limited tools of working people which could play a useful organizing role if controlled by a vanguard party, but otherwise could at best achieve limited monetary gains for a select group of workers. In other words – and as with the Lipsets and Perlman's of the world – political struggles in the trade union were about either the personalities in control, or cosmetic change.

Finally, a fourth group may be described as an 'anti-union' left – though the degree to which this term applies certainly varies. This group, at times Leninist, at times anarchist, at times eclectic, identifies union members as a labour aristocracy, only tangentially involved with the 'real' working class which lies outside organized labour. In some incarnations, such as the work of Stan Weir, it is union executives and professional staff who are the culprits, leading a blind and bound membership down the garden path (Weir, 1983); for others, such as Richard Hyman, union leaders' conservatism is not nearly so malevolent, but is in fact as much a result as a cause of member apathy (Hyman, 1983) – that is, members are apathetic because unions are undemocratic formal organizations, and unions are undemocratic formal organizations because members tend to be apathetic.

It was not until the late 1960s and 1970s that a new generation of left – oriented scholars resurrected some of the marginalized political analyses of the pre-World War I left – that left dismissed as 'syndicalist' and 'left-communist' by Leninism – in the context of the collapse of the Keynesian order and the explosion of 'new social movements'. These scholars, many with activist histories, sought to fashion a left critique of the AFL-CIO-style unionism that

dominated not only North America but much of the world. Direct action over formal grievance and arbitration processes; direct democracy over union electoral politics; shop-floor knowledge over legal skills – these writers, overwhelmingly historians, delved into the theoretical heritage left by Rosa Luxemburg and the Council Communists, built on the few influential unorthodox radicals of the 1950s and 1960s (such as C. Wright Mills, E.P. Thompson and C.L.R. James), and resurrected the nearly-forgotten examples of the Knights of Labour and the One Big Union, championing their mass- and community-based struggles over the exclusionary and narrow bargaining strategies of ideal-type craft unions.

These 'social movement' labour analysts (David Montgomery, 1987; Howard Zinn, 1980; Piven and Cloward, 1979) re-wrote labour history, reminding academics and activists alike that *the union* was not always a bureaucratic organization, but began in the everyday struggles of working people at their jobs, in their homes, in their communities. They reminded us of a radical and militant heritage, not in the archives of a Soviet museum, but on our very streets. They reminded us that a union is not a politically-connected organization managed by highly-paid executives, but farmworkers facing carcinogenic pesticides, women managing childcare, home-care and sweatshop-labour, immigrant communities resisting employers who use them as strikebreakers and white workers who see them as job-threat. Where Weber spoke of organizational structures and political balance; where mainstream labour scholars spoke of great men and political influence; where Leninists dismissed any and all non-party organizing as at best

misguided and at worst actively *bourgeois*; against all this, the social movement theorists emphasized the creative power of workers, and the struggle between democratic organizations of working people and electoral regimes *on behalf of* working people.

The scholars of social movement unionism were the first to take seriously splits and debates, competing interests, compromises, betrayals, trade-offs, exclusions and to recognize rebellions and potentials and alternatives. But this group, too, has its limitations, one of which stands out. The critical analysis of trade unions since the late 1960s has tended by and large to propose that the contemporary labour movement re-learn the organizing tactics and strategies of its more community-minded predecessors, that trade unions trade their formal alliances for more active protest, and that efforts be made to make democracy meaningful within the labour movement. Two assumptions lie beneath virtually all of this work, however; first, they tend to equate 'democracy' with a more radical political stance, speaking less of process and more of policies, and hearkening, in that regard, to Lenin's notion of democracy as ideology; second, and more significant for this study, the union reform approach implies that the trade union remains at its core a viable organizational form, and that a greater emphasis on democracy will suffice to rejuvenate it.

Democracy as Problem and Process – pessimism and insight in Robert Michels:

If Weber established bureaucracy and structures of governance as a key part of modernity and a pivotal area for social research, Robert Michels took the

analysis one step further, and dropped it squarely in the lap of emerging labour and socialist movements: his 1911 work *Political Parties* examined bureaucracy as it was emerging within the anti-capitalist organizations of Western Europe and concluded, like Weber, that such developments were inevitable and irreversible. Unlike his contemporary, however, Michels saw little to redeem modern governance, concluding that the only thing more inevitable than organization was its descent always and everywhere to authoritarianism.

Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy" echoed Weber, finding that the characteristics of state and enterprise governance likewise inhered to Communist Parties and trade unions. But Michels further argued that (working class) organization's very *raison d'être* is the pursuit of power on a grand scale, which necessarily implies that primacy be given to organizational growth and political survival. These, in turn, imply that efficiency must be prized, Party discipline must be maintained, a professional cadre must be employed, and – perhaps most significantly – organizational health must be valued above individual principles. In other words, though the working class organization begins as a means by which to struggle, it very quickly becomes an end in itself (Michels, 1911: 338), overshadowing not only the individuals involved, but the very imperatives which called the organization into being in the first place.

Michels explores the organization in depth, considering the political economic, and even psychological aspects of social movement formation and deformation. But like Mark Leier more recently (1995), Michels notes in particular a triplet of phenomena:

1) bureaucracy/ professionalism - by which the organization's growth and expansion engenders "the transformation of a number of proletarians with considerable intellectual gifts into employees..." (Michels, 1911: 108). This further entrenches specialization and centralization of knowledge-power, such that the staff come to embody a new form of leadership, also indispensable to the organization's continued viability. Between elected leaders and staff, power is highly concentrated; democracy may be the end, but it is no longer the means (Michels, 1911: 113)

2.) representation/ democracy - "As organization develops, not only do the tasks of the administration become more difficult and more complicated, but, further, its duties become enlarged and specialized to such a degree that it is no longer possible to take them all in at a single glance" (Michels, 1911: 71). And as this complexity increases, "it becomes more and more absurd to attempt to 'represent' a heterogenous mass" (Michels: 1911: 76)

3.) governance/ class management - Organization along lines of skill or craft becomes largely about managing various groups of workers, both inside the organization and outside; the struggle becomes "the struggle for the feeding ground" (Angelo Mosso cited in Michels, 1911: 273); unions become protectionist, anti-immigration, actively contributing toward the definition and defense of a "noble" working class above and intensely

hostile to the 'rabble' (Michels, 1911: 275); "the 'Union Officer' then becomes a boss...a labor lieutenant of the capitalist class" (Michels, 1911: 289).

Taking these different but inter-related dynamics together, Michels concludes that the paradox facing trade unions and working class parties is this: democracy is inconceivable without organization, but organization necessarily tends – through bureaucracy - to oligarchy. Those processes by which workers form a recognizable mass, capable of making and winning demands, are precisely the processes against which that mass must then struggle – representation, singular strategy, numerical strength, command of and efficient use of resources. Organization gives democracy; organization also then steals it away (Michels, 1911: 61-2).

Robert Michels' work has been highly influential in academic circles, but has had virtually no currency among those to whom it was addressed – activists in the socialist and trade union movements. The reason for that silence has not been studied, but clearly significant was the split in the 1930s of the international socialist movement into two distinct and highly antagonistic camps – the orthodox Marxist Leninist (including Trotskyist⁹⁹) and the social-democratic. Among the

⁹⁹ In much literature, and countless political battles, Trotskyism and Stalinism are represented as the two primary variants of Marxism, deeply at odds. Nonetheless, I believe it is appropriate, for historical, political and analytical reasons, to consider them as variations on a Leninist theme, rather than fundamentally different approaches to Marxism as critique or as politics. Both arise directly out of the Bolshevik experience, and that Revolution's Leninist foundations. And there are grounds to consider that they arise as rivals less out of deeply-ingrained political differences and more out of competition for political leadership. Both share Lenin's emphasis on the professional political party; both share a stagist view of transition to socialism via conquest of state power and centralization of property in the hands of the state; both share similar conceptions of working

former, Michels' could be simply accused of confusing capitalist authoritarianism with democratic centralism, and his comments promptly discarded¹⁰⁰; for the latter, Michels' distaste for liberal democracy was anathema, and his affiliation with Marxism enough to make any insights he might have had suspect. Michels remained, then, as a source often cited among students of political and organizational theory, but rarely as more than a crank, and almost never as an important lamp-post for those actively involved in organizing working class movements.

Michels' thesis, however, – that increasing effectiveness as an organization represents at the same time disintegration of the social movement – is an important one to consider. But is it, then, simply a question of trade-offs? Are the dangers of organization necessary evils for the establishment of an effective workers' resistance?

In their *Poor People's Movements*, Piven and Cloward argue quite the contrary – that not only does organization tend toward bureaucracy and incremental conservatism, but that it is not even effective as a means of social change (1979). Through case studies of labour, civil rights, and welfare reform movements, Piven and Cloward find that while formal organizations may put pen

class and vanguard; both share in the Soviet Union's history of repression of alternative Marxisms and the quelling of dissent (let us remember Kronstadt and Trotsky's role as commander of the Red Army); both advocated the delay or subsumption of other struggles to the class struggle, understood as conquest of the state by the party; both shared in the economic logic which underlay the Soviet blueprint generally, and such market-driven experiments as the NEP. In short, Stalin and Trotsky both emerged from the Leninist tradition, and shared the key logical and conceptual elements that are the subject of the critique in these pages.

¹⁰⁰ Something which became infinitely easier after Michel's pessimism led him to trade Marxism for fascism.

to paper establishing certain reforms as law or bargaining for specific gains, by far the greatest leaps towards change occur not in spite of but precisely *because* of the less stable, more anarchic and more radical demands associated with untamed rebellion.

The political impact of Piven and Cloward's work, then, is to explode the myth that bureaucracy is a necessary evil for the movement to effect change: any effectiveness is generally limited to the immediate term, and is an opportunistic effectiveness – not in a derisory sense, but as a seizing of political space opened by the movement. This is not to dismiss the achievements of formal organizations, as incremental gains may set the stage for further struggle, but rather to bear in mind that such gains generally constitute a horse-trade to resolve immediate crisis and defuse the real problem – that un-managed multitude whose movement cannot be predicted and whose desires may not be contained by appeals to reason. But if the goal is profound change, growing resistance, deepening critique, and a deepening of capital's crisis – as a critique which does not shirk must be – then Piven and Cloward's point – that formal organization cannot offer permanent or ongoing effectiveness in any revolutionary sense – is a significant one. On the contrary, if the substance of capital and class is relationship, and an ongoing tension between command and freedom, then the organization clearly falls on the side of command, managing resistance, channeling anger, defusing revolt. And if democracy is a process of opening space for alternatives, rather than a structure or a handbook of procedures, then democracy can only thrive in the movement.

MARX ACROSS THE PAGES

MIKE LEBOWITZ MENTIONS IN HIS *BEYOND CAPITAL* THAT TO BE A MARXIST IS NOT TO BELIEVE MARX GOT IT ALL RIGHT, BUT TO BELIEVE THAT, STARTING FROM MARX, IT IS POSSIBLE TO GET IT ALL RIGHT. I AM NOT SURE ABOUT THE "GETTING IT ALL RIGHT" PART, BUT I AM CONVINCED THAT A READING OF MARX FOCUSED ON RELATIONSHIP AND PROCESS CAN TAKE US A LONG WAY.

IT PLACES FRONT AND CENTRE THE THEFT AND MURDER THAT INAUGURATED THIS WORLD SYSTEM – SOMETHING WHICH QUITE ASTOUNDINGLY SEEMS ABSENT IN THE VAST MAJORITY OF MARXISMS AND SOCIOLOGIES. IT RECOGNIZES DAILY INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AS THE FUNDAMENTAL STUFF SOCIAL STRUCTURES ARE MADE OF, WHILE NOTING ALSO THAT THOSE RELATIONSHIPS CONFIGURE OTHERS, EXPAND, AND TAKE ON A SOCIAL LIFE NOT INDEPENDENT OF BUT CONSTRAINING UPON NEW RELATIONSHIPS. IT CAN STRESS THE FLUIDITY OF CLASS AND CAPITAL, REMINDING US TO BE ATTENTIVE NOT ONLY TO THE STRUCTURES AND INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE IDENTIFIED WITH THEM, BUT TO THE PERSONAL INTERACTIONS THAT MAKE CLASS, MAKE CAPITAL – AND AT THE SAME TIME MAKE GENDER AND RACE AND ETHNICITY AND AGE AND SEXUALITY. IT CAN BE EQUALLY DAMNING OF CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM AS WE'VE KNOWN IT, AND CAN HEARKEN ALWAYS TO SOMETHING MORE FREE, MORE LEISURELY, MORE PASSIONATE. IT CAN CARRY ME FROM GUATEMALA'S DEATH SQUADS THROUGH NICARAGUA'S ARMED HOPE, FROM THE MURDER OF STEVEN BIKO THROUGH THE STAND-OFF AT SIX NATIONS, FROM A WALK-OUT AT TELUS TO MY CURRENT JOB FOR THE UBC FACULTY ASSOCIATION.

Chapter 14

Something Like a Conclusion

Robert Michels was onto something, but fell into disillusionment - and eventually fascism - precisely because he couldn't work his way out of the contradiction between goal and process, between ends and means. His great contribution was in articulating not only that the ends don't justify the means, but that in fact the means become the ends. But here he faced the dilemma – his conclusions in hand, Michels had either to accept the logic of the organizational trade-off, or take a step beyond the linear and economistic Marxism of the German Social-Democratic Party and toward that kernel common to anarchism and critical post-structuralism: the possibility that perhaps the ends are secondary, that perhaps the conflict is never resolved.

That step requires a different reading of Marx, one in which the dialectic is merely an analytical tool, but a dynamic never, in fact, resolved; one in which the working class is neither an identifiable mass nor a social force defined by any particular ideology or program, but rather a *provocateur* of crisis, for working class power ultimately resides in the moment of crisis and the threat crisis presents; one in which communism is never a state but always a potential, always a tension. That step requires an emphasis on that at once destructive/creative power of workers, that possibility of refusal, that great 'NO' that underscores all of Marx' own analysis as well as Tronti's refusal and the contemporary metaphors of *nomad*, *multitude*, *exodus* and *hydra*.

Such an approach builds no utopias; such an approach builds no alternative systems; such an approach offers no solution to disorder. But that is precisely the point. We have had enough of order, we have had enough of management, we have had enough of systems. Class analysis is not intended to provide a blueprint to freedom, nor a set of tenets to be learned by rote. It is a way of understanding conflict and struggle, and a way of identifying tensions between order and freedom, work and leisure, accumulation and subsistence. And it is a ruthless critique of everything existing, in which our role is to trouble and to resist. Piven and Cloward remind us that this was ever only the source of change – we trouble, they manage. And this, here, is a Marx worth remembering.

And the Point, then?

The preceding pages have wandered over a wide landscape of history, literature, and political struggle, but ultimately focus on a few key questions.

- 1) What is the relationship between the idea of the 'working class' and the kinds of organizational responses that have been typical of the left?
- 2) How can we understand the 'working class' to exist in a meaningful sense without reducing it to either identifiable individuals or a specific ideological position?
- 3) And if we do distinguish class from people, organizations, beliefs or strategies, what are the implications for the left as we have known it?

Class, for Marx, is a social relationship about work. Through violence and forced labour, populations are robbed of their land and left with no means of subsistence other than to work for others. The details are beyond our purposes here, but the critical points are Marx's observations that the growth of capital refers to ever-greater expansion of this particular relation of work, and that over generations the submission to work becomes the social norm, its ultimate origins in violence largely forgotten.

Marx, however, wasn't solely concerned with explaining or documenting class relationships. His was a political project, and the purpose of his work to put an analytical weapon in the hands of workers. It's a critical point, as it separates Marx from philosophers and academics more generally, and provides important context for understanding how and why various pieces of his work are presented as they are. It is, also, however, a massive problem, and one the left since Marx has grappled with again and again: how do we make theory into politics, and what happens when the social tension represented by the term 'class' is translated for the purposes of political organization.

These challenges emerged even with Marx himself: in his own adoption of the concept of 'productive' labour when conceptualizing the political class to build socialism; in his range of positions on the relationship between class as a social tension and class as an organized mass in the Party; and in his own occasional distinctions between class in itself and class for itself – distinctions that recognize the need to develop a separate language for political work, though this project never really comes to fruition in his writings.

But if there are hints of the problem in Marx, it became the centre of left discussion and debate in the years since: in the split of the First International, and the break between socialism and anarchism; in debates between Luxemburg and Bernstein – the former defending the distinction between ‘the working class’ and ‘the poor’ and stressing the integrity of the analytic concepts, the latter trying to form a political program and plan for more equitable distribution; in the German Social Democratic Party’s debates on spontaneity of resistance versus party-led strategic direction; in Council Communist criticisms of Bolshevism, and Lenin’s dismissal of left communism as ‘an infantile disorder’; in Stalin’s ‘socialism in one country’ and Preobrazensky’s ‘socialist accumulation’; and in theory and practice over the course of the twentieth century, as anti-colonial movements, agricultural workers, feminists, students, and professional and managerial workers challenged the boundaries of what constituted work and who was legitimately a worker in the analytical scheme, and whose interests would be taken into consideration by various left organizations.

And after all of this, as we have seen, by mid-twentieth century, in the context of the cold war and the rise of Keynesian approaches to management of capitalism, the left was above all a political creature concentrated around two main poles – that which arose from the Leninist tradition and which was organized in Communist Parties, and that rooted in liberal democratic traditions, expressed as a general social will in social democratic parties and as an explicitly working class politics in the trade union. And the political implications of that development are well-known to us, too – Communist Parties, on taking power,

became managers of states, and were soon quite explicitly arguing that Marxian categories of analysis had no place in a post-revolutionary world; trade unions, in gaining legal recognition, formally accepted the legitimacy of the work relationship in exchange for a role in managing the terms of production. In both incarnations of working class organization, then, the emphasis shifted dramatically from one of resistance to one of order. What was a method of analysis to unpack social relationships was transformed into a political program for an imagined creature called the working class - and this had significant repercussions on the ability of class as a concept to explain social relationships.

This tension between class theory and the organizational left has been, then, a central characteristic of the left since Marx. How different the two projects had become, though, became concretely apparent with the generalized social rebellion of 1968-1973, a rebellion rooted largely in populations the left never seriously considered, and a rebellion, too, that demonstrated that the traditional left had become utterly irrelevant, at best blindsided by the crisis and unable to make it fit classical theories, at worst actively colluding with capital to discredit or repress other voices of resistance.

In the face of this left-wing paralysis, a wide literature commented upon the sea-change in social subjectivity, and the rise of new social actors who either defined themselves or in some sense really were 'non-classed'. These new social movement theorists frequently based their conclusions about class neutrality or irrelevance on definitions of class rooted in financial security, self-identification, or socialist ideology - none of which really define the term

analytically in the Marxist tradition, but all of which had, politically, been used by the left to define its own relevance and the boundaries of its organizations. In positing socialism as an economic alternative to capitalism, and in defining the working class as an identifiable group of people, the left had abandoned an analysis rooted in social relationships and complex interactions for one more easily put in service of formal organization. Trade unions defined the boundaries of class by a Fordist, factory-based model of work that excluded the vast majority of the global population; Communist Parties defined the legitimate working class in ideological terms, as indistinguishable from the Party itself. And neither left was able to understand, let alone demonstrate organizational or analytical relevance for the more generalized social rebellion in which identities of work and community, race and gender and sexuality, public and private, state and society blurred and complicated one another.

Marxism is a method of deconstruction. It takes apart seemingly natural or monolithic social relationships, locates their complex histories in concrete power relations and daily interactions of real human beings. And from that flows the notion of working class we see in Marx – an ever-present potential, a possible resistance, a threat always being only partially managed, that illuminates the points of crisis and cleavage in the social order.

The left has long been frustrated by the fact that Marx left only this critique, this promise of something beyond capital, but no clear picture as to what that might be or how to get there – but that's exactly the point. A method of

deconstruction cannot show the way to a politics of order. And that is not a failing. There is plenty of order; there are plenty of compromises and new plans to manage and establish a new equilibrium. But these will always have their own fault-lines. And it's the search for those fault-lines, and the tension between resistance and order, rebellion and social transformation, that is precisely what class theory does at its best, and precisely what the left as political animal so long ago abandoned.

The years since the upheaval of 1968-1973 have seen a continuing of crisis, both within the global economy generally and within the left. Capital still, thirty five years later, has been unable to register the levels of growth it saw during the years of Keynesian heyday; neoliberal economic policies which dominated the landscape in the 1980s have been tempered worldwide – that is, while the pro-market logic and mistrust of anything classically 'leftish' continue to dominate in many quarters, there is by no means any global consensus among capital's own intellectual and political elites. And after a period of relative quiet in the early 1990s, the last decade has seen the deepening of social crisis and resistance from West Africa to Southeast Asia, from Baghdad to New Orleans, from France to the Philippines.

And class theory is back, too, in another wave of scholarly and political work from long-neglected Marxisms, 'left-communisms' and anarchisms, and materialist post-structuralisms. Gone is the language of classless new social movements, and in are more ominous terms to define contemporary rebellion – as a many-headed hydra, a subterranean beast emerging and vanishing and re-

emerging from sands and oceans; as a nomadic wandering, an exodus away from work, state and institutions of command; as a threatening multitude, faceless and shapeless, without any cohesive framework. These terms speak not predominantly about identity-formation or cohesion, but about refusal and rage; not about state solutions or alternative economic frameworks, but about the building of communities and solidarities outside of order. These are rebellions that embody, passionately and at times violently, the ruthless critique of everything existing.

So we've come full circle – to a time of profound social change, profound crisis, as the legitimacy of economic and political authority is called into question and traditional organizations of opposition are no longer capable of maintaining even the façade of relevance. It's a moment not unlike that Marx would have watched from his window in the 1840s as he scribbled away at the notebooks we call the Grundrisse that were to become the blueprint for his work over the next many years. And for us it's a moment to go back to that first great challenge: the relationship between class as an analytical concept and class as a subject for political organization.

How do we 'do' working class politics? I don't pretend to solve this, the fundamental question of the left for over a hundred years. But we can start, I think, by acknowledging that the very idea that something called 'the working class' can be defined and delineated is wholly and utterly unhelpful. Class is a term of relationship, and is at once universal and specific – it is universal in that it invests the entire social fabric, but specific in that it emerges in and through daily

human relationships, with all their particularities and peculiarities. And as such class simply is not reducible to any individual or organization or collective will. To make a concrete subject of class is to build an imagined community, one that like all imagined communities is built upon myths to either justify or ignore its cleavages and exclusions and contradictions.

And at some point – whether it be when union staff strike a union office; or when factory workers break machinery or agricultural labourers steal produce in Cuba; or when unemployed white autoworkers in the US form anti-government militias; or when former Workers Communist Party activists in Iraq build alliances with Islamicist networks to take on US and British forces – at some point we need to sit up and acknowledge that class tensions and class identities are not static or stable, and the history of class struggles is *not* the history of the left. At some point, we need to choose between the political left of our organizations and the uncomfortable, unstable and messy world of class analysis.

But does that mean that class analysis is an academic exercise, so we can all congratulate Dr. Marx on his work and move on to other pursuits? Clearly not. Class may be complicated, we may all play multiple class roles, and it may be dangerous to build a political movement on such shifting ground. But without a politics the theoretical work isn't worth the paper it's written on. So what then?

Here let me return one last time to Robert Michels - we'll find him now in an uncharacteristically optimistic mood:

The peasant in the fable, when on his death-bed,
tells his sons that a treasure is buried in the field.
After the old man's death the sons dig everywhere
in order to discover the treasure. They do not find
it. But their indefatigable labor improves the soil

and secures for them a comparative well-being...
Democracy is a treasure which no one will ever
discover by deliberate search. But in continuing
our search, in laboring indefatigably to discover
the undiscoverable, we shall perform a work which
will have fruitful results in the democratic sense.

Process and relationship. If these are the building blocks of social relations, and if structure is the accumulated history of particular processes, particular relationships, then liberation – democracy, communism, freedom – can likewise only be process and relationship, something akin to a way of being, not a state achieved.

In these pages, we have uncovered two very different lefts that sit together uneasily – one is a left of class analysis, of deconstructive critical method, of how power is reproduced in daily interaction, of class as a resistance and a potential. And the other, an organizational left, which nurtured me, but whose emphasis has been on the rhetorical and then political formation of a unitary working class, with defined and delineated boundaries, whose core ‘class’ content is permanent and fixed, and which has some identifiable ‘interest’ that can be fixed, too. There’s no question that one left emerged out of the other; there’s no question they are densely interwoven in our history. But they really are fundamentally different things, with different underlying logics and different agendas. And if we can conclude anything from the history of twentieth century class struggles, it is that we can no longer sustain any longer the myth of their commonality.

Postscript

September 11, that day that inaugurated a new global order and is remembered for its murder; that day, too, represents a strategy at once cultural, economic, political, military, to wage class war on a global scale, because the enemy is global; that, day, too, signifies a continental counter-revolution, an integrated military from the arctic circle to Tierra del Fuego,

September 11, 1973. With the overthrow of Salvador Allende, with the ascendancy of Augusto Pinochet – so begins the era of what in the 1980s and 1990s was called neoliberalism, what is now simply named ‘globalization’, what happens when capital becomes a “cultural logic”. September 11, 1973, a new strategy is unveiled, though perhaps it will not be recognized as such for some years – an offensive to quell rebellion, silence dissent, roll-back rights, and – ultimately – roll-back wages, not only on the streets of Santiago, but in coffee-shops in New York, classrooms in Ohio, slums in Rhodesia, football stadiums in Mexico City, city squares in Prague, riverways in Vietnam, United Fruit plantations in Guatemala, housing cooperatives in Vancouver, kitchens, corners, hearts and minds.

And now, fast-forward thirty-odd years...and counting...

We’ve passed another September 11, which for many defines yet another political era. But I’m not convinced. This cast has trod the boards many times

before this – Teddy Roosevelt tackling the evils of Spanish imperialism in Cuba and the Philippines; Ronald Reagan confronting the reds in...pick a country. If there is anything new, it is that Americans feel vulnerable, feel scared. If there is anything new, it is that somehow September 11, 2001 represents the end of that sacred myth that America is the world. Two September 11s, the globalization of counter-revolution and the devastation of blowback. And somehow the violence is bleeding off the margins and onto the page.

And are we surprised? I remember gunshots in Rio San Juan, Nicaragua, and waiting with eyes shut tight for the *contra* to come exploding into the room. I remember Alejandro's arrest somewhere in California – a typical bank robbery, a security guard dead, just another jail sentence; but what the papers didn't tell was this was a fundraising campaign gone awry for a revolutionary movement that controlled three-quarters of the territory in its country. I remember the tears when substantial numbers of *compañeros* began cutting ears off their paramilitary enemies – the fierce arguments over whether this signaled it was time to abandon armed struggle to prevent its descent into bloodlust, or whether to push on to victory. I remember all this from before I was thirteen years old. So no, I'm not surprised. Violence preceded the era, violence inaugurated it, violence has defined and shaped it, and now violence threatens it from all sides, and from within. It all returns to violence. I'm terrified.

But somehow, I am also profoundly hopeful – more hopeful, I think, than I have been for a long long while. I'm not inventing any revolutionary intentions for the World Trade Centre bombers; I have no illusions that mass murder can

achieve anything beyond mass murder; I certainly know enough of blood and guts and bodies not to romanticize. But the violence also suggests something more.

Steven Biko's words echo: *if you guys want to do this your way, you have got to handcuff me and bind my feet together, so that I can't respond. If you allow me to respond, I'm certainly going to respond. And I'm afraid you may have to kill me in the process even if it's not your intention* (Biko, 1978: 153). That's where the hope lies – in whatever brutalized shape – the violence is perhaps the loudest reminder that we still respond, we still resist, we still hope. From the conquest that birthed Europe to contemporary Afghanistan, Iraq, and any day now Iran; and from the burning of Digger collectives in 1649 England to King Leopold's bloody Congo to the squads that hunt street-kids in Sao Paulo in the early hours of this morning, the continuity is there - there's a lot of fear in murder; there's a lot of pain in revolutions and counter-revolutions. But despite the violence and sometimes, in a strange way, even because of it, there's something profoundly hopeful in the gentlest women and men I know – my father among them - smoking, cleaning their guns, reading poetry, and keeping an eye out for American boats.

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Trabajadores

Winnipeg Sun

Interviews

All interviews were conducted between October and December of 2004, in Vancouver, B.C.

Interview 1 – Former local president of an educational workers' union, former staff representative for that union, currently staff representative for another trade union.

Interview 2 – Former staff representative for unions representing health care and educational workers respectively, currently working as a consultant for various BC unions.

Interview 3 - Current Executive Director of a union representing educational workers; formerly hired staff representative and elected officer in the same union.

Interview 4 – Arbitrator, former panel member of the BC Labour Relations Board, and lawyer representing numerous provincial and national trade unions.

Interview 5 – Former clerical supervisor for a union representing educational workers; currently working in the higher educational sector.

Interview 6 – Former staff representative for various international and local unions.

Interview 7 – Professional researcher for one of the BC's large trade unions, and former member of a staff union bargaining team.

Interview 8 – Clerical worker for a large BC union.

Interview 9 – Elected executive member of a large union representing communications workers.

Interview 10 – Arbitrator and mediator, former professor of organizational behaviour, former executive member of a national federation of educational unions.

Appendix
Research Approval Documents