

UPPING THE ANTI

...a journal of theory and action...



number one

A PROJECT OF THE AUTONOMY & SOLIDARITY NETWORK

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Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of *Upping the Anti*. We have been working on bringing you this issue since September of 2004. We have been torn between the desire to get something out according to our original timeline (February of 2005) in order to establish the journal as a timely and viable project, and our wish to produce the most politically relevant publication that we can. In this, our first issue of the journal, we feel that we have done our best to strike an appropriate balance between these two objectives. So here is *Upping the Anti*, our first effort in an ongoing project of trying to engage with and understand the political conjuncture facing radical activists in the Canadian state today.



In every issue of the journal, we begin with an editorial in which we try to work out a collective perspective on pressing issues of the day. In this, our first editorial, we outline the impetus for the project, and reflect upon the strengths and limitations of such concepts as anti-capitalism, anti-oppression, and anti-imperialism in building new radical movements in Canada and internationally.

We are very pleased to bring you two important interviews that we think will have relevance for activists seeking to understand past, present and future struggles. Grace Lee Boggs is a social justice activist who for the past six decades has paired tireless community organizing with a long-term commitment to reassessing and renewing radical ideas. She has worked with political figures such as Malcolm X, Kwame Nkrumah, CLR James, and Jimmy Boggs, as well as taking part in the civil rights and Black liberation movements. Our second interview is with Ward Churchill, an indigenous scholar and activist who is today the subject of a massive attack on academic freedom by neo-conservative forces in the United States. Churchill has tirelessly chronicled state repression and genocide in the Americas and brings an important perspective for people thinking about radical social change. We bring you an interview we did with him two years ago in which he speaks about the anti-globalization movement and the potential for effective resistance to the war at home and abroad.

In the first of three essays in this issue of the journal, Gary Kinsman provides an introduction to autonomist Marxism and outlines how this current provides useful political tools for understanding and conceptualizing strategies of revolutionary change based on working

class self-emancipation. In our next essay, Chris Hurl chronicles the development of the radical anti-capitalist wing of the anti-globalization movement and critically examines the concept of “diversity of tactics” as an approach to organizing. Finally, we reprint an essay by socialist feminist Selma James, written some 30 years ago, that remains an important contribution to discussions taking place today around the intersections of race, gender and class.

This issue also launches the first of a series of roundtable discussions with activists on specific issues of concern to radical movements. Sharmeen Khan brings together Gary Kinsman, Kirat Kaur, and Junie Désil to discuss the politics of “anti-oppression,” while Aidan Conway draws together a series of interviews on the “organizational question” with Robbie Mahood, Indu Viashistink, and Jeff Shantz who offer reflections from different Marxist and anarchist communist perspectives. In our next issue we look forward to bringing you other similar discussion forums looking at anti-war organizing, Palestinian solidarity activism, and advocacy and activism in defense of immigrants and refugees.

We close with reviews of two important books, Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender*, and Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s *Multitude*. *Undoing Gender* is an important political contribution to debates and discussions taking place within the feminist and transgender movements, while *Multitude* is Hardt and Negri’s follow-up to their influential and controversial book *Empire*.



We should stress that our approach to the project has not been to produce any kind of “party line” on the questions facing radical activists today. Instead, we see *Upping the Anti* as a space to discuss ideas currently being expressed and elaborated in contemporary social movements. In particular we want to explore what we see as emancipatory Marxist and anarchist contributions firmly grounded in feminist and anti-racist politics. In so doing, we are aware that a wide range of contrasting and even contradictory political ideas and approaches will be put forward in the pages of this journal. For example, in our interviews with Ward Churchill and Grace Lee Boggs, it is clear that there are a wide range of political questions upon which these two activists are divided, and we have our own disagreements with some of their perspectives. We do not share Grace’s enthusiasm for the potential of a revitalized wing of the Democratic Party in the US under the leadership of Dennis

Kucinich, and we are skeptical of a number of Ward's formulations regarding the nature of the revolutionary project in North America. However, we offer these divergent political opinions in the spirit of opening up principled discussion and debate on the radical left. We encourage you to write us letters, polemics and articles engaging with points of view that you find provocative, and to make a contribution to these debates. Our goal is to create a lively and non-sectarian forum for debate and a tool that can be appropriated and effectively used by those interested in rethinking how we organize and build effective radical movements for social change.

Due to the prohibitive costs of producing and distributing versions of this journal in a conventional format, we are experimenting with a model of production and distribution based on a central PDF file, available online. Distributors can print *Upping the Anti* wherever they are, and in whatever quantities they see fit. This first issue is being distributed in more than a dozen different cities, and in most Canadian provinces. If you are interested in getting hard copies or becoming a distributor of the journal in your area, please get in touch with us or check out our web site for details.

In closing, we would like to thank all the members of our advisory board who have assisted us in the production of this first issue of the journal. We look forward to producing our next issue for Fall 2005 (the final deadline for submissions to the next issue is July 1, 2005).

In autonomy and solidarity,

Aidan Conway, Tom Keefer, Sharmeen Khan.
March 26, 2005.

Editorial: Upping the Anti

Our name *Upping the Anti* refers to our interest in engaging with three interwoven tendencies which have come to define much of the politics of today's radical left in Canada: anti-capitalism, anti-oppression, and anti-imperialism. These three political tendencies, while overlapping and incorporating various contradictory elements, together represent the growth of a radical politics in a space outside of the "party building" of the sectarian left and the dead end of social democracy. Despite their limitations, movements based on these "anti" politics have grown out of a real process and practice of social contestation and mobilization, and they point towards ideas and activist practices which will have a significant role in shaping the form and content of new revolutionary movements born out of future cycles of struggle against exploitation and oppression. This journal is intended to provide a space to address and discuss unresolved questions and dynamics within these struggles in order to better learn from our collective successes and failures.

ANTI-CAPITALISM, ANTI-OPPRESSION, ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Our involvement in and conception of these movements in Canada is based on the politically formative moments of our generation, beginning with the fall of Soviet Union, the first Gulf War, and the Oka crisis of 1991. In the decade following these events, anti-corporate and anti neo-liberal movements began to emerge in response to a renewed capitalist offensive implemented by all political parties at every level of government. As the 1990s wore on, different kinds of mobilizations against the cutbacks emerged from within the student movement, the labour movement, and poor and oppressed communities, and a definite anti-capitalist current began to take shape. The first signs of the new anti-globalization movement and the anti-capitalist tendencies within it were publicly manifested during the 1997 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) demos in Vancouver, and they were dramatically confirmed by the battles on the streets of Seattle during the November 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Over this same period of time, and in response to patriarchal, racist, and heterosexist dynamics in the radical movements of the 1960s and 70s, feminist, anti-racist and queer liberation movements continued developing an analysis of power relations and domination

both within and outside of our movements. Moving from individual and small group “consciousness raising” into a wider politics of “anti-oppression,” these perspectives sought to collectively address different forms of oppression. As liberal aspects of “anti-oppression” became increasingly co-opted in the guise of multiculturalism and identity politics, radical trends within these movements continued to articulate a politic that combated capitalist, (hetero)sexist, racist and neo-colonial domination. This political tendency has been most pronounced in women’s centers, campus activist groupings, and in political formations of queers and people of colour. Anti-oppression politics became intertwined with the emerging anti-capitalist movement, and insisted that issues of process and internal dynamics within our own movements be considered as seriously as the outside structures and institutions we were trying to change. Anti-oppression politics provided a critique of the white- and male-dominated leadership of movements, advocated a politics of representation within these movements, and argued that the political formations of the privileged needed to learn from and work in solidarity with those most affected by the processes of capitalist globalization and imperialist domination.

The development of a pronounced anti-imperialist current within radical organizing in the Canadian state has been a more recent and less prominent phenomenon than that of the anti-oppression and anti-capitalist movements, though it was always present in small pockets of activists working around specific issues, especially around indigenous struggles and solidarity projects with third world liberation movements. The more recent manifestations of the dynamics of imperialism and neo-colonial domination on the world stage have given rise to new anti-imperialist movements, as the second Palestinian Intifada erupted, attacks on immigrants and refugees intensified in the wake of 9/11, and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq became the focus for global protests. Within the Canadian context, the struggle against imperialism is evident in attempts to expose Canadian involvement in the anti-Aristide coup in Haiti, in support for anti-colonial indigenous struggles at Sun Peaks, Grassy Narrows, and Kanehsatake and in recent attempts by formations like “Block the Empire,” the June 30th Coalition, and the Mobilization Against War and Occupation to point to the complicity of Canadian capital and the state in wars and occupations at home and abroad.

BEYOND CHEERLEADING: TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF THE “ANTI’S”

The movements defined under the rubric of anti-capitalism, anti-oppression and anti-imperialism represent the organic striving of many hundreds and indeed thousands of activists within the Canadian state who are seeking to challenge the entirety of the system which dominates our lives. Despite the advances made by these movements, one of the most glaring problems we face is the fact that our definitions and understandings of the systems we oppose have often been limited to *reactions* against various forms of injustice. We have rarely developed, much less popularized, a systematic critique of these problems, and by and large most theoretical development of these issues has remained at the rhetorical level.

Often, “anti-capitalism” is used as an empty phrase, a catch word for being opposed to the entirety of the system. Very rarely are those of us who use the term able to explain exactly what capitalism is, how it works, and what can possibly overturn it. Our “anti-capitalism” is an article of faith, located outside any real tradition of anti-capitalist critique. Without an analysis that goes beyond understanding capitalism as a static “thing” that we oppose, we can’t get beyond a moralistic rejection of a vague and general “system.”

Despite the liberatory possibilities implicit in an anti-oppression analysis and practice, an understanding of oppression occurs all too often outside a consideration of the totality of social relations, and once again patriarchy, racism and (hetero)sexism, for example, are treated as static and un-changing “things.” The question remains: how do we understand the intersection of class oppression and economic exploitation with race, gender, and sexuality? While many activists doing anti-oppression work are striving to make these connections in both theory and practice, different priorities and answers are emerging within various communities of resistance.

A similar dynamic occurs in the context of anti-imperialism, where what we consider to be the relationship of imperialism to capitalism can determine a great deal about our movement’s strategic orientation. While discussions of “imperialism” in the anti-globalization and anti-war movements is a welcome development (and reflects a certain radicalization) too often “anti-imperialism” amounts to grafting revolutionary sounding phrases onto the assumptions of liberal anti-corporate populism and left-nationalism, and so can ultimately undermine strategies of resistance. For instance, there is a definite

left-nationalist camp within Canada that sees “imperialism” solely as a phenomenon of US domination, a separate enemy from capitalist elites here in Canada or in Europe, which are considered somehow more progressive, multilateral, or “humanitarian.” More is at stake when this perspective, as within the specific context of the Canadian state, serves to mask the continuing reality of colonial oppression faced by indigenous peoples, and the historic and still politically relevant oppression of francophones inside and outside of Québec.

A similar problem exists in our comprehension of forces directly combating imperialism, which has important implications for how we consider our anti-war work, and the positions we take in relationship to anti-imperialist movements. For example, in opposing the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, how can we concretely and effectively build solidarity while at the same time organizing against the “war at home”? Do we support all forces resisting US occupation, even those that are led by reactionary religious fundamentalists and that carry out tactics we reject? If so, how do we do this in an effective manner that is in keeping with our political principles?

Because activists have largely only dealt with theoretical questions like these as they relate to tactical issues of immediate concern, we often end up in cycles of floating from issue to issue. Coherent critiques have been made of “anti-globalization summit hopping” and the current state of anti-war organizing has exposed our inability to sustain long-term movements capable of drawing on widespread popular support. On the other hand, the search for meaningful forms of local organizing has tended to transform militants into “radical social workers.”

There is a long tradition of radical community activism that involves mobilizing social services, advocacy and support aimed at addressing and meeting the immediate needs of different communities. For example, radical feminists in the 1960s and 1970s mobilized to create women’s centres and shelters in response to violence against women, and to provide spaces for feminist organizing and empowerment. However, despite an origin in radical politics, this connection has been lost over the years as many organizations providing these vital community services have become bureaucratized and “professionalized.”

Those organizations that have maintained their connection to movements, on the other hand, are likely to be defunded or to come under attack. The focus on meeting the needs of the community

and resisting attacks from the state has drained the ability of these organizations to focus on longer-term strategic goals as they fight, day-by-day, to remain open. Additionally, they are often forced to distance themselves from radical coalitions and movements in order to survive.

In the midst of today’s global restructuring of government roles and responsibilities, activists have again responded to crises felt in their communities. In trying to replace or maintain underfunded state structures (that may only offer palliative solutions to deep structural problems) advocacy and front-line support work has again been influenced by, and in turn influenced, broader social movements. The fact remains that without a connection to movements that “fight to win” *and* an orientation to radical social change, this work can become depoliticized and depoliticizing, preventing us from developing strategies for going on the political offensive.

DEBATE, DISCUSSION, CONSOLIDATION: THE NEED FOR POLITICAL SPACES

With the relative absence of spaces within the movements of the “three anti’s” to make theoretical contributions about how we can best combat capitalism, imperialism, and various forms of oppression there has been no real space for integrated analyses to take shape. Outside of the left-liberal media, the main places in which analytical and theoretical contributions to understanding these issues are being made is in academic institutions, left wing party formations and within personal and informal networks of activists.

In academia, the theoretical work that is being done is almost always disconnected from actual struggles taking place. Written in a language of specialists, this work is rarely aimed at making useful interventions in the movements on whose behalf it supposedly militates. Generally speaking, right wing and corporate attacks have been successful in greatly reducing the capacities of universities to serve as spaces where the production of radical political thought and action can take place. This could well change in the face of future mass radicalizations, since universities have often been flash-points of social conflagration, but the fact remains that most academic work being produced today is greatly lacking in terms of its ability to actually connect to radical movements.

Another source for producing and disseminating revolutionary knowledge has been far-left socialist organizations. The problem here is that most of these groups remain stuck in trying endlessly to repeat

the “lessons” of revolutionary practice drawn from the Bolshevik revolution or the works of this or that influential Marxist. While there are great insights that can be drawn from Marxist thinkers and from all previous revolutionary upheavals, these insights can only be realized by considering them in their real historical context, and understanding how our own situation may or may not make these perspectives relevant. Real revolutionary praxis must be willing to criticize past practices ruthlessly and assimilate the lessons of past revolutionary movements and theorists without becoming enslaved to their ghosts. Unfortunately, much of today’s “Marxist” left is stuck in the defence of static party lines, deploying pre-packaged “revolutionary” theory with just enough politics to be able to reproduce their own organizations. Each party remains the bastion of its own brand of absolute truth, each has failed to adequately grasp the new conditions with which we are faced, and each has by and large refused to grapple with and make the necessary political innovations to learn from the enriching critiques of (and contributions to) Marxism made by feminist, anarchist, anti-racist, and queer movements.

The third space of theoretical production is the local and informal level within anti-capitalist, anti-oppression and anti-imperialist movements. Many of us are involved in the anti-globalization movement, in organizing around indigenous struggles, in Palestine solidarity work, in putting on anti-racism workshops, in operating women’s centres and creating queer spaces, in creating small anarchist collectives, info-shops and bookstores. We are all engaged in a process of theorizing and trying to learn the lessons of past and present experience when we gather informally to talk about what in our organizing has worked, and what has failed. Our biggest challenge is to create common spaces for those of us dealing with similar problems and questions in different cities and social circles. In the absence of a formal, structured, and open political space of debate, most of these discussions remain isolated within informal networks. Political pronouncements tend to come from the mouths of prominent activists, often chosen for their visibility by the mass media, and because many of our organizing spaces are so committed to immediate and specific campaigns, theoretical reflection is discouraged and limited by the immediate necessity to “do something.” The challenge that currently faces us is how to get this much-needed process of debate, discussion and resolution to occur beyond small groups, personal networks and prominent individuals,

and to have it take place openly and transparently where it can be critiqued and developed by all who have a stake in our struggles.

CONCLUSION:

The growth of these three sets of “anti” politics represent the striving of a new political generation for some kind of revolutionary change. While against “capitalism,” “oppression,” and “imperialism,” these movements offer no conceptual and practical alternatives to the system that currently exists, and no strategies for getting there. While these movements are not yet coming up with revolutionary answers to the age old question of “what is to be done,” we think they will increasingly, under the force of circumstance, be pressured to do so. For contrary to ruling class ideologists, we have not reached the “end of history.” All of the evils of class society remain and are intensifying in the form of new ruling class offensives carried out under the banners of “free trade,” “globalization,” and the “war on terrorism.”

As gloomy as the situation may seem today with the continuing global weakness of the left, a gathering ecological crisis, the retaining of state power by Bush and his cronies, and the brutal terror being wrought daily against the people of Palestine, Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Colombia (to name just a few examples), we believe that the balance of forces will eventually shift and that new revolutionary movements will emerge on a world scale. Already new sources of counter power to capitalism and imperialism are developing in the circulation of struggles between the anti-globalization and anti-war movements. We are inspired by the example of the Zapatistas and other socio-political movements in Latin America, as well as the steadfastness of the resistance against US and Israeli occupations. We believe that it is not at all unrealistic to expect that in the coming years both resistance to global capitalism and its own contradictions will produce new openings for revolutionary movements not seen since the last major upsurge of struggles in the late 1960s. In such a radicalization, the question of what kind of a system we are fighting, what can replace it, and how we can do this without creating a new and more repressive system in its place will become questions of world historic importance.

We do not presume that we or others writing in this journal can provide definitive answers to questions that can only be resolved by millions of people mobilizing to achieve their own needs, desires, and struggles. What we do believe is that building spaces in which to discuss and to begin to formulate some preliminary answers to

these questions is absolutely vital to the continued development and transformation of the radical left in the Canadian state. For if we do not take on the responsibility of building these spaces for discussion about what it is we are trying to achieve and what the best way is to do it, these questions will continue to be defined and answered by left-liberals, disconnected academics, social democratic reformists and trade union bureaucrats, and the vanguardist socialist left.

In this spirit, *Upping the Anti* will try to address questions such as: What do we mean by terms such as oppression, capitalism, imperialism and revolution? How can we build and connect labour, anti-racist, feminist, queer, and anti-capitalist movements and perspectives? What can we learn from the successes and failures of anti-capitalist activists in the anti-war and anti-globalization movements? How do we understand capitalist social relations, and what social forces might give rise to real alternatives to capitalism? How should anti-capitalist activists connect with working class struggles both within and outside the labour movement? How can revolutionaries organize in ways that maximize our effectiveness but that don't replicate old patterns of elitism, domination and sectarianism? What can we learn from different strands of Marxist and anarchist theory as we grapple with these questions?

Given the constant (re)production of ruling class hegemony by the mass media and apologists for the capitalist system, and given the tireless efforts of reformist forces to recuperate radical movements, our success in upping the ante in struggle against oppression and exploitation will depend on our ability to articulate our own visions and strategies of transformative change on a local, inter-national and global scale. *Upping the Anti* intends to be a space where we can attempt, in small but important ways, to begin doing just that. We invite you to join us in this endeavour. ★

“Revolution as a New Beginning” an Interview with Grace Lee Boggs

part 1 of 2.

For over 60 years Grace Lee Boggs has been thinking about and working towards making social change. Along with her late husband, the African-American writer and activist Jimmy Boggs (1919-1993), she has been centrally involved in numerous grassroots organizations including the Johnston-Forest Tendency, Correspondence, the National Organization for an American Revolution, the Freedom Now Party and Detroit Summer. She has worked with and provided counsel to hundreds of writers and activists including Malcolm X, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, CLR James, Raya Dunayevskaya, Kwame Nkrumah and Stokely Carmichael.

*The daughter of Chinese immigrants, Grace Lee Boggs was born in 1915 in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1940 she received a Ph.D. in philosophy from Bryn Mawr College. Refusing to settle for an academic lifestyle, she moved to Chicago to join the movement as a tenants rights activist. In subsequent years she moved to Detroit and became a leading member of socialist, Black, and Asian liberation struggles. In 1973 she co-authored with James Boggs the book *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* and in 1998, she published her autobiography *Living For Change*. Now in her 90th year she writes a weekly column for the *Michigan Citizen*, participates in the organization *Detroit Summer*, and otherwise remains an active member of the Detroit community. Today, Grace works with the Boggs Center, a non-profit community organization based in Detroit's Eastside which was founded in 1995 by friends and associates of Grace and Jimmy to honor and continue their legacy as movement activists and theoreticians. The webpage of the Boggs Center can be accessed at <http://www.boggscenter.org>. Grace was interviewed by Adrian Harewood and Tom Keefer on July 22, 2003 at her home in Detroit, Michigan. For a transcript of the complete interview please go to http://auto_sol.tao.ca. We will be publishing the second part of the interview in the September 2005 edition of *Upping the Anti*.*

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Upping The Anti: In your autobiography you talk about the decimation of the working class in Detroit through automation and mass layoffs. Do you think the US working class is disappearing, or is it being re-created in the high-tech and service industry?

Grace Lee Boggs: The information industry is being increasingly exported. The computer scene is going to India. The manufacturing working class has been replaced to some degree by the information industry working class, because that work can also be exported. The work that can't be exported is the work around public utilities and services such as schools which affect the local population.

Most people think that jobs are the answer to racism, to poverty, etc. We have to understand that jobs no longer play the role they did in periods of scarcity. We need to measure the worth of a human being in very different ways, and we don't know how to do that yet. We don't have the philosophy for it yet. We are coming from a period of Cartesian concepts of the separation of body and mind to a whole new era of uncertainty. This brings with it a different concept of reality, and a new potential for change. We are at a very different place, and we have to change our whole mindset.

A beautiful place to start doing that is Detroit because Detroit is a wasteland. We are the products of rapid industrialization. In the first half of the twentieth century people came to Detroit to marvel at the Ford Rouge plant where there were 120,000 workers under a single roof during World War II. The strikes and sit-downs during the 1930s looked like they were Marx's *Capital* coming to life. It was just amazing! And now technological developments and the export of jobs overseas have turned the city into a wasteland. So what do we do? Do we dream of bringing back industry? Or do we recognize that, to be a human being, you have to have a different relationship with the earth, a different relationship with your fellow citizens, a different relationship between country and city. So many changes need to take place. How do we translate that into struggle? Into organizing?

UTA: But on a global scale isn't the industrial working class growing?

GLB: That is one way you can look at it. Or you can look at how globalization is affecting workers and villagers in India, for example, how it is destroying the environment and increasing inequality. They begin thinking about another way of life, another way of development that doesn't mimic the patterns of capitalist development we have gone through in the West. That is how we need to think. I don't think we can just accept globalization and its continuing expansion. We have

to wonder how globalization has affected how people think. How does this experience help us organize?

UTA: Is there a distinction between the kind of grassroots organizing that you do and the more traditional revolutionary organizing which focuses on the taking of political power?

GLB: Marx thought that workers needed to take state power. He thought that capitalists were too competitive to do what was necessary to create the material conditions for communism. So he called for workers' power, state power, and Lenin did much the same thing.

If you're living in a Third World country, you see the capitalists putting their money into hotels, into bars, into all sorts of consumer things instead of into the means of production. And so the tendency is to think, "we need to start with the state." But in revolutionary struggles throughout the twentieth century, we've seen that state power, viewed as a way to empower workers, ends up disempowering them. So we have to begin thinking differently. The old concept used to be: first we make the political revolution and then the cultural revolution. Now we have to think about how the cultural revolution can empower people differently, and create forms of dual power.

Some folks call it a new civil society. As Bush's power begins to disintegrate (which it's bound to do with all the contradictions that are involved), there's a new power emerging that already has new values, that is already participatory. It is a very different scenario.

We have to think in much more cultural terms, which we didn't do in the past. For Lenin, the cultural revolution that was to come after the taking of state power had mainly to do with literacy. But we have to think about culture in a very different way because we live in this society of abundance, consumerism and materialism.

UTA: How else should we be thinking of it?

GLB: Well, for example, all of the identity movements of the 1960s and 1970s and so forth have given us a sense that culture has something to do with relationships between people. The ecology movement has taught us that culture has to do with our relations to the earth. And now the whole business of 9/11 has made us realize that culture depends on our relationship to other societies—the rest of the world. So we have a very different concept of culture and what it means to be a human being than we had in the past.

UTA: Lenin offered the model of the centralized vanguard party that stands at the forefront of the masses and seizes state power, and I think most people would agree that it's

not a useful model for today. But there are also many non-Leninist revolutionary traditions, such as the traditions of Council Communism reflected in your book *Facing Reality*. Does the conception that you had of workers councils still apply today?

GLB: Let me start by saying that I don't own *Facing Reality*. In fact, I disown *Facing Reality*. *Facing Reality* was written in 1957 following the Hungarian Revolution, mainly by CLR and Selma James. CLR was ecstatic about the Hungarian Revolution, even though it was destroyed almost immediately. Just to have it emerge for a few days to him was proof that Marx had been correct, which in my opinion is not the way to make revolutions. I think too many radicals use events to demonstrate the validity of their ideas, rather than as challenges to further our thinking.

CLR James asked me to come to London to work with him on the Hungarian Revolution and *Facing Reality*, and I went. But what was very much in my mind at the time were the new concepts of leadership that came out of such things as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Highlander School (where Rosa Parks went), the local National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and the Women's Council, led by Joanne Robinson, who circulated leaflets calling for the bus boycott.

Though it wasn't what you would call a vanguard party, there was leadership. And, importantly, it was emerging from the necessities of the situation and the local people. The people themselves decided that they would walk rather than ride. Out of this emerged the possibility of people being transformed through struggle. Martin Luther King was able to articulate all that. Out of the Montgomery Bus Boycott came all the other movements.

I think we have a way of looking statically at leadership and workers, of putting everything in boxes instead of looking at the complexity of living history, and at how many different forms of leadership emerge to create movements. Static ways of conceiving revolution came out of the 19th century and culminated in the Chinese Revolution of 1949, and they are now outmoded. The Montgomery Bus Boycott initiated a new era of movement-building that has become a new way of transforming society.

UTA: How does movement-building deal with the state?

GLB: There is an anarchist movement emerging among young people in the United States which is a very different kind of anarchism

from European anarchism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It doesn't emerge so much from theories of the state, but is more about how to empower people. It is based upon the concept of empowerment rather than the concept of power. Power is very much a nineteenth century concept. The concept of empowerment is a movement concept. It's the way by which individuals become conscious that their experiences are social experiences and that there is power in consciousness-raising and acting together. I don't think we know everything about it yet because it's very recent. It's only been forty years. But I think we need to understand that divide between the revolutions of the first half of the 20th century and the movement-building of the second half.

UTA: Can you speak more about the rise of this anarchist movement? Are you referring to the events since Seattle and the anti-globalization movement?

GLB: The anti-globalization movement came out of the movements of the 60s and 70s. Starhawk, whose consciousness comes out of the women's movement, had a lot to do with the organizing of affinity groups. It's a very different consciousness from the Marxist-Leninist stuff, which is very patriarchal and Newtonian. After 9/11, for example, Starhawk said that when you hold big, national demonstrations, you should break them into small groups so that people can talk and relate to one another. She also has this whole idea of affinity groups doing their own decision-making. That's a much more decentralized, democratic scenario.

There's also this concept of creating a civil society. All kinds of people, including academics who don't call themselves anarchists, are talking about that sort of thing. They use the Philippine People Power I and People Power II as examples. People Power II took place in 2001 when thousands of Filipinos held a demonstration to protest against the corrupt government of President Joseph Estrada. Out of the demonstration and the different groups that had assembled, they elected a committee which started meeting monthly and then weekly. When the committee called for everyone to assemble, two million people came together in the square and Estrada had to step down. That's very different from the way most people think about political revolution.

UTA: There seem to be a number of successful examples where mass mobilizations were organized democratically on a grassroots basis but then it seems that capital is able to

absorb these efforts by making token surface changes that don't challenge property relations.

GLB: That's the hardest thing to change. I remember that when I became a radical, what made me a radical was the decision to get rid of capitalism. We never thought through what it meant to "get rid of capitalism." But our language showed that we were thinking we could rub it out the way you rub something off the blackboard and replace it with a socialism that would emerge from the working class as Marx described it in *Capital*.

UTA: In Facing Reality, you speak of building new institutions and creating a new society within the old one through mutual aid and solidarity. Are these methods of self-help and organization capable of transforming the system, or do they just ameliorate certain people's conditions while other people face the might of military repression or genocide?

GLB: It seems to me that like CLR James, you are asking these questions out of ideology instead of real history. In *Facing Reality*, CLR was basing himself on the concept of the invading socialist society, on Marx's "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" in *Capital*, in which there is the famous paragraph about how the proletariat is organized and disciplined by the process of capitalist production itself, so all that is necessary is for it to emerge is to bust the integument of capitalism. I don't think most people realize the degree to which that scenario, which seemed to be coming to life in 1938 when CLR arrived in the US was the basis of CLR's revolutionary thinking. I remember how he would declaim passages like, "The proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing." What is the meaning of the word "is" in that sentence? It's like defining what is real by your definitions. So if someone says "the proletariat is disappearing," or "the proletariat is reactionary" (which we know it has been; you just have to look at the US working class in relation to the Vietnam War), you deny that they're talking about the "proletariat" because Marx said "the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing."

It's that kind of circular thinking that was very much in the thinking of CLR and to some degree in Marx. Marx was writing in the British Museum; he was not experiencing all the contradictions that emerge in reality. I remember falling in love with what Marx said about the Paris Commune being "the political form at last discovered to resolve the economic conditions of the proletariat." I remember how it opened up my mind when I first read it. But since then I have thought to

myself that the Paris Commune took place in 1870 in France in a war between the French and the Germans. It's not impossible that a model like that will emerge out of the Iraq war, but to think it's going to take on the same form as the Paris Commune is a kind of thinking that we should rid ourselves of. It involves taking a model that happened in historical reality, and gauging your perspectives for the future on that model when you know that history is always changing.

It's simplistic thinking which I realize is very attractive to young people. You're at a time in life when you want things to be simple, to be able to say, "yes, that is what the world is like." But that's not the way the world is. The world is changing all the time. That's the first principle of dialectics.

CLR wrote *Notes on Dialectics*, in which he savaged Trotsky for getting stuck in the concept of nationalization as the essence of revolution because that is what happened in the Russian Revolution. Trotsky, he said, had ignored Hegel's main contribution to dialectical thinking, that you shouldn't get stuck in fixed concepts. But then CLR did the same thing! I presented a paper last year called "Beyond Scientific Socialism" at a National Labour History Conference on a panel with four people who had worked very closely with CLR James' circle of associates. I said that CLR always criticized the fixed notions of everybody else, especially Trotsky, but never questioned his own fixed notions in regards to Marxism. He never, never, never, though he lived 100 years later, questioned Marx's paragraph about the working class in his chapter on the "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" in *Capital*. While the working class was constantly changing, CLR was still holding fast to Marx's idea of the working class organized and disciplined by the process of production itself.

Jimmy Boggs wrote a pamphlet called *But What About the Workers?* in 1974 when everybody could see the amount of competition, of bourgeoisification that was taking place among the working class, particularly in America following World War II. At the time it looked like this country could do anything its heart desired. There was all this abundance, and labour organizing was all about getting more of this abundance for the workers. CLR was no longer in the US and he wasn't wondering, as we were, whether conditions had changed to such a degree that the working class was no longer a radical force for social change, and that conditions had become more complex than Marx could have imagined in 1867.

UTA: How do you account for the fact that at this moment there are more auto-workers in South Korea than there were industrial workers in the entire world when Marx wrote *The Communist Manifesto*?

GLB: I am not interested in making the Korean revolution. My task is to make the American Revolution! There are all sorts of contradictions emerging in South Korea which the Koreans have to grapple with. I have to deal with the American working class, and I have to look back at what I have thought and written about the American working class. Shortly after World War II, I contributed to a pamphlet called *The American Worker*. Under the name Ria Stone, which was my party name at the time, I wrote the theoretical section, re-stating Marx's ideas on the working class. As I look back at it now, I realize that what I wrote came completely out of books, and not out of real experience. It is true that World War II was a tremendous experience for everybody in this country. People in plants and in the military learned so much from one another. It was as if Marx's working class was coming to life as it had in the 1930s. But shortly thereafter, things began to change.

If you ask me questions about the South Korean workers, are you doing that because you are interested in making the South Korean revolution or because you feel it's necessary to continue justifying and validating Marx? I don't think revolutions should be about validating ideas that were written by somebody who was living at another time and in another place. That's too fundamentalist, and is why people talk about Marxism as a kind of religion. If you become a Marxist, you should become a Marxist for the purpose of making the revolution. You should not become a Marxist for the purpose of validating Marx!

UTA: Why do you think that you evolved and CLR James did not?

GLB: I think one of the main reasons I changed is because, after 1953, I had this experience of actually being part of the Black community, actually working in a day-to-day fashion with people in the community, with workers.

If I had lived in New York, if I had gone on living in Union Square, I probably wouldn't have changed. I came to Detroit because CLR and Raya Dunayevskaya, the real leaders of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, had decided that we had to go beyond Marx in a certain sense and identify what we saw as new social forces: women, Blacks, rank and file workers, and young people. We had already anticipated going beyond

Marx's scenario. So it is possible that if CLR had remained in the United States, he might have begun functioning on that basis. But for reasons not of his own making, he lost the opportunity to have that experience. And he might never have been able to experience it anyway because he was not really native or indigenous to the movement here. Moreover, as long as he was here and didn't have citizenship, he had to function in a very small group. It's very difficult to come from outside, and be able to appreciate the organic development of a movement. I was very lucky that I married Jimmy Boggs, very lucky that the Black Power Movement emerged around the time that I had already settled into the Black community, so I could become a very integral part of it and therefore be in a position to evaluate what I had done and what I had thought.

UTA: Along with the cultural revolution that you've talked about, particularly in your articles relating to Martin Luther King, you seem to suggest the need for a personal transformation. You suggest that we need to be constantly evaluating ourselves and that we must, first of all, come to terms with who we are as individuals. Perhaps you could expand on that?

GLB: I recently made a speech called, "We Are All Works in Progress." I love that concept of works in progress. I'm very fortunate that I have experienced sixty years of activism, and can see the progress that I have and have not made! I'm not sure why I was fortunate enough to be able to change and to keep changing as reality has changed.

During the Black Power Movement, I was what many people regarded as one of the best organizers in Detroit. I essentially organized the Michigan Freedom Now Party and helped get it on the ballot, which no other group in this country was able to do. In almost every city they tried to launch a Freedom Now Party. We were the only ones who did it, and we did it in part because I was the coordinator. I was also the main organizer of the Grassroots Leadership Conference to which Malcolm X made his famous speech. I was able to do this in part because of the skills in organizing that I had developed during the period that I was in the Marxist organizations who were very good at this sort of thing. Also, the circumstances were very ripe, and I was in contact with people who wanted to see this happen, and who were in a position to make it happen. So when the Detroit rebellion exploded in 1967, even though Jimmy and I were out of the city, we were considered among the six people responsible for it. I didn't make

the rebellion happen, but some of the things that I had done in the 1960s were part of what helped people see that they needed to erupt in some way. So it gave me a lot to think about.

Up until 1967 I had never thought that you had to distinguish between a rebellion and a revolution, because in the thinking of Marxists all you had to do was get the oppressed angry and in motion, and they would sweep away the existing structures and that would bring a new society into existence.

After the rebellions, I realized I had almost transferred that concept of the working class to Black people, to the Black social force. And then I looked around me and this Black force that had exploded were the kids down the street – people I knew, with all their contradictions and weaknesses. What was going to make them revolutionary? I began to see the fundamental weaknesses in the concept of “*debordement*” in Marxism-Leninism, that all you need to do is mobilize people, get them angry enough to sweep away the old society and bring in the new.

It wasn't going to happen that way. It was obvious that we needed to do a lot more work, do a lot more thinking about what constitutes a revolution, and how it's distinguished from a rebellion. A rebellion does not sustain itself. People who start out as rebels, thinking that they can do everything, end up by begging those in power to give them more. I realized how far short of a revolution a rebellion is! Once we began thinking about what constitutes a revolution, there was still the question of how you bring it about. How do people begin embracing new values, creating the new infrastructure, and practicing the new relationships that are necessary for revolutionary social change?

Instead of the old binary polarization between reform and revolution, we had to grapple with what brings about transformation. Immanuel Wallerstein says that 1968 brought to an end the political thinking that had dominated Western society since the French Revolution. The French Revolution had made it clear that the people at the bottom needed to be considered. Out of that recognition came the politics of Conservatives who decided that “we're not going to let them push us around” and also that of the Liberals and the Socialists, both of whom wanted the state to make reforms that would ameliorate the conditions of the poor. After 1968, Wallerstein said we had to begin thinking differently. The divisions that now matter are not the old ones between reform and revolution, whether you change slowly

or rapidly. We now have to begin the long, difficult job of rethinking what it is we have to do.

I don't say that everyone has to do this rethinking. But anybody who has been serious about the Marxist-Leninist tradition needs to do it. Other people will keep doing what they find necessary depending on where they are at historically. They don't have to get rid of all that baggage. But those of us who have been part of the movement, and who took it seriously, need to do some rethinking. And it's not easy to do.

When you talked about South Korea, I was reminded of that kind of thinking. You're trying to hold onto an ideology that encompasses all of reality so that everything that happens can be seen as a sort of validation for what you think. And that was very much the way we radicals thought. We were always looking for validation.

What we need to do is examine that idea very, very carefully. First of all, I think that the concept of the future as unknown and as dependent on what we do in the present is something that we have to keep very close to our hearts. We have to see revolution as a new beginning, and see ourselves as participants and as creators, as opposed to forecasters, of the future. Rebecca Solnit has written a beautiful article on this, quoting Virginia Woolf. During the very dark days of the First World War, Woolf wrote that hope must be held onto because the future is inscrutable. Not that it's dark, necessarily, but that it is inscrutable, unknown. It's important to think that way if you're going to be a revolutionist. You have to believe that what you do has meaning because it creates something that previously did not exist, and was not known or even thought about. You have to be very careful that what you do does not replicate the past. There are so many historical examples of regimes, brought into being by what we consider revolutionary actions, which ended up replicating the institutions they replaced.

UTA: What was interesting about the anti-war movement that developed in response to the recent US invasion of Iraq was not only the size of the demonstrations, but also their global character. One thing some organizers talked about was that it was not really the already organized activists who were responsible for bringing out millions of people on February 15th, 2003 in what was the largest worldwide protest in history. They said that the true organizers of the event were the Bush and Blair governments.

GLB: In the old radical days, we used to argue about “what was the cause?” as if there could be only one cause, and if you deviated from naming that single cause, somehow you were betraying the movement. Now we know that the causes of the anti-war movement were extremely complex. Bush had a whole lot to do with it. If he hadn’t provoked the movement, we would be in a much more difficult position. My contribution to the anti-war movement is the column I wrote titled, “Don’t Leave It All to Dennis,” referring to Dennis Kucinich who is by far the most progressive candidate in the Democratic Party.

UTA: He’s the congressman from Ohio?

GLB: Yes. I spent a weekend with him at a retreat last year. At 31, Dennis was the “Boy Mayor” of Cleveland, Ohio. He pledged in his campaign that he would not privatize the utilities. Under pressure as Mayor to give in, he refused and was not re-elected. So he had to start all over again and build himself up through state elections to finally becoming a congressperson. He is a product of the Mid-West working class. His roots are steelworkers and miners and he’s of Eastern European ancestry. That’s one of the reasons I like him. We need someone from the working class to emerge as a national figure with a vision. The working class has taken such damn beatings over the years. Kucinich represents the most visionary and progressive program, but we should not leave it all to him. We should begin getting as many groups together as we can to create a kind of dual power structure that ties the anti-war movement to local struggles, taking advantage of the fact that the people who are participating in today’s anti-war movement are very local. Neighbours are going to national anti-war demonstrations together. They are making conscious efforts to hold local demonstrations side by side with national ones. So I’m meeting with a group of local people and we’re going to talk about that. To me, politics means trying to achieve something in a fluid situation and not to be boxed in.

You probably know that the Green Party met in Washington D.C. a couple of days ago and apparently the majority of the group have determined that they are going to run a candidate. I think we should make a distinction between this period, the period that leads up to the Democratic primary, and the period after the Democratic primary. First of all, we have no idea what will happen to Bush. He’s digging himself into a very deep hole. There are a whole lot of unknowns in this next period but we have to decide what to do now. I voted for Nader in the last election, partly because the Democrats were going to win Michigan anyway.

These are very concrete questions. The tendency of Marxists has been to deal with elections abstractly because we didn’t really believe elections made a difference. In the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers’ Party, we used to run candidates because we viewed elections as an opportunity to get out our message. But I don’t think that’s the way people grow - by conversion to the ideas of a few people. They have to go through their experiences and be engaged in struggles. Those are some things I have had to learn.

UTA: There’s a very poignant moment in your book *Living for Change* – it seems to be an epiphany for you – when you meet James Boggs and he teaches you the importance of “loving America enough to change it.” For you, at the time, the idea of even voting was anathema, it wasn’t something that you did. In your most recent pamphlet you talk about how “we must be the change.” Perhaps you can talk about those two ideas, “loving America enough to change it,” and the notion that “we have to be the change.”

GLB: Jimmy once said, “that’s the narrowness of a lot of radicals; they say they hate this lousy country. I love this country not only because my ancestors’ blood is in the soil but for the potential of what it can become.”

When I was a radical in the Marxist-Leninist sense, I was an outsider. I really moved from place to place. I don’t know how many times I moved while I was in New York. I was a student in New York, and in Philadelphia. I went to Chicago and then back to New York. I lived in California for a while. I was very transient in a way that radicals tend to be. They go, so to speak, where the action is, or where the party wants them to go. What I found when I came to Detroit was that Jimmy belonged to a community. It was a community that had been transplanted almost intact from the little town of Marion Junction, Alabama, where he was born. For him, voting was a question of citizenship. I never knew for whom he voted, but he always voted because he carried around this idea that he had a societal responsibility. It’s a very different concept from that of radicals. Radicals don’t take responsibility for this society because it is a capitalist society, an enemy society. They never learn what it is to practice politics and be responsible, even for their own neighbourhoods. So the way they behave in neighbourhoods is scandalous. They don’t realize how this really estranges them from people in the community.

UTA: Can you elaborate on that?

GLB: I often talk about how Jimmy would go out every morning and clean the corner. He would pick up all the litter on the corner. When the gutters backed up because of heavy rain, he would be the first one out there to clean the gutters. He felt that he was a citizen of his block, of his city, of his country. And I had never thought that way because radicals don't think that way. We're outsiders. We cherish our "outsiderness." I've come to believe that you cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it. I didn't know that until I met Jimmy. That's why I had never voted.

A couple of years ago I was at this retreat with Vincent and Rosemary Harding. Vincent has been extremely eloquent on this subject, quoting Langston Hughes; "America never was America to me, and yet I swear this oath, America will be!" And I now think that way. Suppose I only said that Detroit's devastation is the result of capitalist de-industrialization – exporting all the jobs. So what we have to do is get rid of capitalism. But meanwhile, I don't do anything about Detroit. How could I live here and not do anything about Detroit? How could I talk to young people about their lives and what they should be doing, if all I said is that we have to get rid of this monster who has de-industrialized and devastated and depopulated us. What kind of revolutionary message would that be? This is not something that most radicals understand.

UTA: What do you think about Malcolm X's comments about "Americanness," and about how he was not an American and didn't want to be considered one? Do you think that in a country built on slavery and on the genocide of indigenous people, we really need to be reclaiming "Americanness," or do we need something that's completely different?

GLB: When you say "something that's completely different," where are you going to locate it? On the moon? There are so many questions involved here. First of all, there has always been a separatist tendency in the Black struggle, which was acted out to a certain degree in the 1960s and 1970s. Counterposing separation to integration was a tremendous part of the struggle of the 1960s. People took and struggled over opposing positions, just as DuBois and Booker T. had done earlier in the century. Because we had this struggle in the 1960s, the perspective of separation was tested, and it is unlikely that we need to go through the separation versus integration struggle again.

The second thing we have to recognize is that Malcolm was changing and undergoing incredible changes. I don't know if you have seen a book by Jan Carew called *Ghosts in Our Blood*. In December of 1964 and January of 1965 Malcolm stayed at Carew's house in London, and the two had long talks. Malcolm told Carew that he didn't know where he was or where he was going politically, and that he was still searching. He knew he didn't want to be around the Communist party, but he felt that what was going on in Cuba was very important. After his break with the Nation of Islam, some people said that Malcolm should have come and spent a year with Jimmy and me to get some grounding. Here was this guy who had made this tremendous leap toward the ideas of the Nation of Islam while in prison, had spent years speaking for Elijah and organizing for the Nation, and was now on his own.

UTA: You tried to recruit him for the Freedom Now Party.

GLB: In September 1964, Milton Henry and I called him in Egypt and asked him whether he would run for U.S. Senator on the Freedom Now Party ticket. He declined. In the spring of 1964, some of us had met with him in Harlem and invited him to come work with us in Detroit. But he had a long way to go, and he wanted to be more on his own, especially after the ideological and organizational rigidities of the Nation. Malcolm was a wonderful guy, but you have to understand that he only had a very short time, only a little more than a year, between his suspension from the Nation in November of 1963 and his assassination in February 1965. During that time he made all these trips to Africa and the trip to Mecca to find out what he thought.

UTA: What do you think is his legacy? What does Malcolm X teach us today?

GLB: The test of revolutionary leadership is the ability to change with the times. Malcolm passed that test very well. I can't begin to tell you how unhappy it made me when, following his assassination, fourteen and sixteen year olds would get up at meetings and say, "Malcolm said, by all means necessary!" as if that was all Malcolm stood for. Malcolm was a person who kept growing and developing. He was a terrific organizer; he was very, very scrupulous about being on time; he was very gentle. So to limit him to the "by all means necessary" statement is very unfair to him and also limits the person who only sees this side of Malcolm. ★

The second and final part of this interview will run in our next issue.

Indigenism, Anarchism, and the State: An Interview with Ward Churchill

Ward Churchill is one of the most outspoken activists and scholars in North America and a leading commentator on indigenous issues. Churchill's many books include Marxism and Native Americans, Fantasies of the Master Race, Struggle for the Land, The COINTELPRO Papers, Genocide, Ecocide, and Colonization, Pacifism as Pathology, and A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas.

In his lectures and published works, Churchill explores the themes of genocide in the Americas, racism, historical and legal (re)interpretation of conquest and colonization, environmental destruction of Indian lands, government repression of political movements, literary and cinematic criticism, and indigenist alternatives to the status quo.

Churchill has recently come under attack for views expressed in the article Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens, written in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. An important part of the future of US academic freedom in the coming years will likely be determined by the outcome of the ongoing attempts to strip Ward Churchill of his academic position at Colorado University in Boulder. Two members of Autonomy & Solidarity sat down with Ward Churchill in Toronto in November of 2003 to do this interview. It was transcribed by Clarissa Lassaline and edited by Tom Keefer, Dave Mitchell, and Valerie Zink.

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Upping The Anti: We want to start off by asking you about your thoughts on the anti-globalization movement which, in terms of anti-capitalist struggles, has been one of the most significant developments in the past decade. This movement has also been criticized in the US context, as being largely made up of white middle class kids running around “summit hopping”. What’s your take?

Ward Churchill: I think the anti-globalization movement, for lack of a better term, is a very positive development in the sense that it re-infuses the opposition with a sense of purpose, enthusiasm, and vibrancy. The downside is that it’s a counter-analytical movement in that it thinks it’s something new. We used to call it “anti-imperialism,” just straight up. The idea that “globalization” is something new, rather than a continuation of dynamics that are at least 500 years deep, is misleading. That needs to be understood.

UTA: In your book Struggle For The Land, there’s an essay called “I Am Indigenous.” Can you elaborate a bit on the politics and genealogy of indigenism?

WC: Perhaps I can by way of your introduction of yourselves. You know, you say you’re post-Leninists. Fine. But why are you something that goes beyond Leninism, rather than something that isn’t?

UTA: It’s a reflection of the roots of where our political grouping came from.

WC: But you top that off by describing yourselves as revolutionaries, and I’m saying “why?” Do you aspire to overthrow the presiding order in the Canadian state so that you can reorganize the state in a more constructive fashion? Then you’re a revolutionary. Do you want to see the Canadian state here when you’re done in some form or another? If not, then you’re a devolutionary and you might want to call it by its right name.

UTA: So would you say that no anarchists could call themselves revolutionaries?

WC: If they do, they’re deluding themselves. They’re not understanding themselves or the tradition that they’re espousing in proper terms because, for starters, anarchists are explicitly anti-statist. And the object of a revolution is to change the regime of power in a given state structure. So I think “revolutionary” is a misnomer.

UTA: One of the issues with devolution is that, at least potentially, it represents an attempt to go back to some kind of ideal way the world once was. But we can’t just roll back the clock of history.

WC: No, of course not. But again we’re into this implicitly Marxist progression, and anarchists aren’t especially progressive. In fact, you get a physical fight from some of them for using that term, because they consider it an insult. And I think properly so. There’s no immutable law of history. The structures, however, aren’t immutable either, and they can be devolved.

One conflation of terms that really bothers me a lot, which seems to be plaguing the discourse still, is the conflation of the term “nation” and the term “state.” You have this entity out there called “the United Nations.” It really should have been called “the United States,” because to be eligible even for admission to the Assembly you have to be organized in that centralized, arbitrary structure. No “nations” as such are even eligible for admission to the United Nations. “The

United States” was a name already taken, however, and this was very useful in obfuscating the reality.

But the upshot of that is that you’ve got a whole lot of anarchists running around thinking they’re anti-nationalist, that nationality, nationalism in all forms, is necessarily some sort of an evil to be combated, when that’s exactly what they’re trying to create. You’ve got four or five thousand nations on the planet; you’ve got two hundred states. They’re using “anti-nationalist” as a code word for being anti-statist. With indigenous peoples, nationality is an affirmative ideal, and it hasn’t got any similarity at all to state structures.

You may have nations that are also states, but you’ve got most nations rejecting statism. So you can make an argument, as I have, that the assertion of sovereignty on the part of indigenous nations is an explicitly anti-statist ideal, and the basis of commonality with people who define themselves as anarchists. We’ve got to deal with our own bases of confusion in order to be able to interact with one another in a respectful and constructive way.

UTA: Are there correlations between your indigenous perspective and anarchism? Many people might make the argument that, in fact, indigenism is an ancestor to anarchism, and not vice versa.

WC: Well, that is precisely my argument. The two are not interchangeable, point for point, but they have far more in common than they have dividing them, if each is properly understood. And part of the task here is to make them properly understood. If you look at green anarchy, for better or worse, you’re going to find all kinds of references to commonalities with indigenous peoples on every basis, from social organisation to environmental perspective. It will take some time, but you can make that conceptual bridge between indigenism and anarchism, and it’s understood.

I would see the main distinction, on this continent, as being a detachment from base. Indigenous peoples are grounded, quite literally. There’s a relationship to the land that has evolved over thousands of years, and that’s completely denied to the people from the settler culture who self-describe as anarchists. With that distinction made, however, we’ve got all kinds of principles in common, aspirations in common, perspectives in common, and we need to build upon those in order to develop a respectful set of relations that allow us to act in unity against that common oppressor that we share.

UTA: After the Seattle actions, you were part of the debate around the whole question of “diversity of tactics.” Do you see the Black Bloc as being an interesting or relevant political phenomenon?

WC: It’s not that I think that breaking the windows of Starbucks is somehow going to bring the system crashing to its knees, or that they even had a conception of what they were actually up against. Clinton deployed Delta Force for that one in case things really did start to get serious. I mean that’s as serious as it gets in terms of repressive capacity in the United States. These are the surgical assassination units, and they were deployed in Seattle.

But if you’re going to go up against that, or if you’re actually going to do serious damage to the structure of things, it isn’t going to happen in some sort of a frontal confrontation with whatever deployment of force the state makes. So it is symbolic, in the sense that it’s educational and kind of empowering. But if you’re going to engage with that force, you’re not going to simply wake up one morning, take a pill along with your glass of water and go out prepared to do it. You have to build the consciousness, you have to build the psychology, you have to build the experiential base, and you have to build the theoretical base, and that happens step by step by step. Maybe the thing that happened in Seattle was a sort of, “let’s get out of the chat rooms and see if we can’t actually make a physical confrontation.” There hasn’t been anything significant along those lines for 25, 30 years in the US.

Now, on the level of street confrontation, what can we deduce from that experience? Well, maybe a first lesson would be: if you actually want to engage in street confrontations as part of a further building trajectory, you might want to ditch the uniforms and stop self-identifying as somebody the police want to neutralize immediately. Unmask yourself, put on a phony beard, or a clean shave. Mask yourself in another way. Just this level of tactical evolution, they’ve refused. And this is part of what leads some people to purport that the Black Bloc is more of a fashion statement than it is a serious political tendency. I’m not convinced of that, but people are clinging to their signs and symbols at a very basic level, in a way that precludes taking the action further. You get these cataclysmic statements of what is necessary, and yet they won’t even ditch the funny little signifier of their identity as a Black Blocer.

UTA: Is there a correlation between the militant tactics and direct confrontation against the state proposed by the

Black Bloc, and the ways in which the Weather Underground evolved from the Days of Rage in Chicago? Do you see a similar kind of progression? What are the lessons to be learned from how those movements failed in the 60s?

WC: The Weather Underground is another thing that I will completely defend. Of the spectrum of responses mounted by the white left at the time, Weather was the most valid response of all, which does not mean that it actually had a viable strategy. But the response pattern was entirely legitimate. But ultimately, they got boxed into symbolic actions, and that is explicitly the case now as well.

Brian Flanagan and Mark Rudd, who are in this new film about the Weathermen, are saying “you know, we made a conscious decision to do only property actions,” which was not the original impulse and not the original understanding. It was a sort of wounded response to having three people killed in the Greenwich townhouse explosion. Well, in human terms I understand that these were their friends and all that, but if you are actually serious about engaging in an armed struggle and plan on testing the capacity of the United States, you have to anticipate that you’re going to incur casualties. And three is hardly an insurmountable toll that’s been taken. So again, you had middle class kids who were posturing as something else, and legitimately wanted to be something else and tried to transcend their origins. But they couldn’t do it in and of themselves, and they didn’t really have an interactive relationship with other movements, organisations, or people coming from a different experiential background and temper. They were a sort of bourgeois response. So you’re saying you’re going to do one thing, but actually you’re unprepared to do it. I can understand that, but I don’t accept that as being a model.

I’m more encouraged by the fact that people are looking seriously at the Black Liberation Army (BLA) and such, despite the valid critique that there was a certain Stalinist content to the organization. And that raises the question of how exactly, without getting into a centralized, arbitrarily disciplined organization, you mount a clandestine struggle. That’s a serious question. How do you go about it? It’s not *laissez-faire*, it’s not everybody do your own thing. It can’t be, or you’re dead. But the BLA and other such organizations were willing to sustain casualties in a serious way over a protracted period. And they were ultimately burnt out because they had no basis for recruiting additional members from

some broader context or mass movement to replace the casualties, and that’s a lesson to be learned and addressed as well.

Weather presented a certain example, but not a model. From that example you can extrapolate the next model, say, the BLA or the Puerto Rican Independence movement. You can analyze and understand where it was that they went wrong, address those issues, and build a more viable model now. But you can’t do that based on knee-jerk reactions and notions of personal purity, which is my critique of pacifism. You’re probably familiar with that critique, and the people who will be reading this are probably reasonably familiar with it as well.

But pacifism is not the only dimension that this would apply to, anarchists in general have this zealous notion of the purity of the political. They are dismissive of anybody who defines themselves as being part of a national liberation movement, without examining that movement in any coherent way. When someone sits down and talks with them about it, well then their objections evaporate. But they won’t abandon the purity of whatever the particular posture is that they’re occupying long enough to become effective.

That’s the problem with the refusal to abandon the mask and the black T-shirts in a certain context too. The Black Bloc is more interested in the affirmation of identity than they are in actually accomplishing their goals and objectives. These are transient things, I would hope. I don’t see them as being a basis to dismiss or discard the impulse at all. I see the impulse as being primarily a positive impulse, and you need to take to its logical set of conclusions. The Black Bloc is the preoccupation of anarchism. Their willingness to physically engage the state at a certain level, as well as to engage in discussions that interrogate their own sets of precepts, are both encouraging signs.

UTA: It’s clear that the Canadian and US governments have expressed serious concerns about the anti-globalization movement and the radical wing within it. You’ve written extensively on the repression of radical movements in the 60s and 70s, and specifically about COINTELPRO. Can you talk about some of the key lessons that radicals today should keep in mind?

WC: You have to be a thinking movement. We can outthink these guys in certain respects. Part of that is never underestimating what it is that they’re capable of, and never underestimating our capacity to come up with a situational response to them. In what used to be

called counter-intelligence, now it's called counter-terrorism, you have guys who devote their entire careers to this. They have an aptitude, a flare for it. And by the time they retire they get really goddamn good at it. In a certain sense, their work is based on perceiving what in the immediacy of a situation might be best, based on their experience, to accomplish a desired result. You could say that it's more intuitive than codified, and our response has to be the same. We have to develop bodies of expertise based on experience in dealing with these things, not just reading the books, and understand that we can't come up with a formula or a recipe of what it is that will work. We have to use common sense and critical understandings of how counter-intelligence processes have worked in the past, and to the best of our ability, obtain information on what they have in place now.

I mentioned the Delta Force earlier. There's actually a protocol that allows the President the discretion to suspend the *Posse Comitatus* act and to utilize particular forces within the US military for the maintenance of civil order. They go to the very highest shelf, the "special" of the Special Forces. All the Delta Force does is train for and execute missions to take out strategic targets among oppositional groups, wherever they happen to be. They were in Seattle in case they were necessary to eliminate the leadership, as defined by the intelligence sources of the US, of the people who shut down the World Trade Conference. They've also been introduced to control prison riots. They were deployed at Waco, which ought to tell you something, and they were deployed at Ruby Ridge. This needs to be absorbed into our collective understanding of what we're up against and to shape the nature of our response patterns accordingly.

I think that this takes care of the idea that we're going to do this by candlelight vigils, moral arguments, petition drives and electoral politics: all of these can be useful in terms of organizing our own communities, but it's going to have absolutely no effect on the structure of power. We're going to have to go to bare knuckles and understand the mechanics of power, and how it ultimately maintains itself – obfuscation, mystification, and by keeping people confused and divided. If people don't stay divided they're going to ratchet it up to the next increment, which includes false incarcerations and all the rest of that. And ultimately you're going to be dealing with the US military's Delta Force. Those are the terms of engagement.

I run through all of that because by and large, even among the self-described most militant sectors, there's not really a recognition

of what it means. They consider themselves to be imbued with certain sets of options based upon varying degrees of social privilege, as if those are going to continue to apply if they actually become a serious threat to the status quo.

Now based on that consciousness, you can begin to develop techniques that apply to the given situations, and there is no recipe for that either. Maybe it's affinity groups in some places but it's really contingent on the situation. For example, in some cases Black Blocers say that they're going to organize based on long term friendships and interaction with people who they know are not infiltrators because they hooked up together when, in all probability, they were too young to have been recruited by the FBI. And they've evolved as an insular, self-contained little group ever since. It's certainly hard for intelligence agencies to penetrate groups like that.

The national structure of the American Indian Movement was penetrated pretty successfully, because you had people drawn together in an organization from a whole variety of locations to function as a sort of a governing council. That was a really bad model. Where we were impenetrable was actually on the ground with the action end of the organization, because these were all family units. The Means family, the Robidoux-Peltier family and their cousins were all related and had grown up together. Well, how exactly do you plant somebody in the middle of that? You don't.

So I would say that affinity groups, however they are to be defined, might be the situational response in a given context. There are others. The thing that is most critically important is to thoroughly understand the techniques that are used by counter-intelligence, usually at the lower levels, and not do the job for them. That means not gratuitously calling people 'cops' in order to resolve political disagreements, which has been an endemic practice on the left. Often intelligence agencies don't even need to insert provocateurs because they can rely on the activists to do it to themselves. Maybe they stimulate it a few times; they plant a few documents, they do whatever they do. The rule of thumb should be: if it acts like a cop and talks like a cop, maybe you treat it like a cop. But you don't call it one. You don't feed into that. If somebody is destabilizing and threatening and they're compromising the integrity or the security of the group, you simply eliminate that person by putting them outside the group. You don't make a public show of it, and you don't put out wanted posters unless you actually have concrete evidence that this is a police operative or infiltrator.

See, we put ourselves in such a compromised position from internal dynamics and bad practices that all they have to do is take this tottering structure, push it, and give it some momentum. At the level that we're organizing now, bad practice is our worst enemy, not the police state. There isn't anybody that I know of who is actually mounting a clandestine operation to try to challenge the authority of the state at this point. We're in a building period, and how we build is contingent, in a large part, on the internalization of these lessons.

UTA: In the US in the 60s, some people on the radical left saw that the elements that were moving first into struggle, the actual radical forces that could overthrow the system, were the movements that had the least to lose and the most to gain from such struggles: the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, etc. But how can we achieve the destruction of state power without the conscious, active support of the majority of the people, including significant sections of the white settler population?

WC: You can't win so long as the bulk of the population is actively in some fashion or another deployed against you. But that doesn't mean that the bulk of the population ultimately has to actively join you either.

I think this is where the Weathermen misunderstood what the dynamic was at the time. They thought people were much more actively committed to physical engagement with the state than ultimately proved to be the case. In retrospect, it's clear that they weren't. The Weathermen thought they saw a parade and tried to position themselves to lead it. They were going to be the vanguard. What's new? We've got three hundred white guys who decided they had their finger on the pulse of history, so they were going to jump in front. They said they were acting in solidarity, but they were defining themselves as a vanguard. The white guy is going to lead the Revolution. They just misdiagnosed the conditions that might precipitate revolution, and ended up isolating themselves.

This would also apply to the BLA, although they had far stronger base in the community than the Weatherman ultimately turned out to have. The significance of the role of the armed struggle was profoundly misunderstood at that particular juncture by virtually all of the actors. They believed that the armed struggle was going to be the catalyst in bringing about a comprehensive transformation of society. And that wasn't the case at all. What led them to this false conclusion was a

withdrawal of consent on the part of increasingly massive numbers of people. You really had a significant proportion of the population that was rejecting, in substantial part, the thrust of US policy. They weren't going to go to war with it, they were just not going to contribute to it. That's the key.

You don't have to have the preponderance of the population engaged in some sort of a final campaign to bring down the government. What you do need is the ability to cause an increasing number of people to withdraw consent from some key sectors that keep the system functioning. And if an appreciable number of those people are going into more active forms of resistance and are supportive, at least to the extent that they won't give you up to the cops and that maybe they will make a contribution, be it monetarily, or by providing you sanctuary, I think that's attainable over the long haul. You have to have a much greater weight in order to take the structure intact and then rearrange its organization, than you need to have it begin to unravel and collapse, and that's actually the aspiration that I hold.

You also have to create counter-models that people can look at, that they can be attracted to: 'Oh yeah, there is another way of doing this and maybe I'd be more comfortable in that context. I don't know for sure because I haven't lived in it, but it looks like something I might like to explore.' That leads to withdrawal, and creates doubt as to the inevitability of state structures and that's what you're trying to create.

Not that you're going to supplant the structure of the state with co-ops, or little land occupations, collectives and so forth. In the 70s in particular, there was this whole notion that you could simply create a society that you want within the shell of the old one, and eventually the old one will wither away. Well that ain't going to happen either. You're going to reach a certain threshold and then the state will begin to actively repress you and try to crush you.

The Black Panthers' breakfast for children program, their community clinics, alternative educational institutions, job placement programs, housing initiatives, and all the rest, when viewed as a package in and of themselves may seem like a very liberal agenda. But it was framed in terms of a very coherent program of self-determination, of self-sufficiency, that sought to remove those service delivery sectors of responsibility from the state, and to place them in the hands of the community.

You don't see a lot of that happening these days. For most people in the anarchist community who organize in their little collectives and get together and eat their bean sprouts and shit... it's only for themselves, at the present time. If you want to talk to factory workers, you need to connect with them where they are, not where you think they should be. You need to get over your prohibition on ashtrays. You keep asking me why nobody shows up, except you, when you organize an event – there's the answer. I've answered the question about 15 times. You may have ideas, you may have counter models and they might be constructive, but if people – coming from the bowling alley or something – have to spend 15 minutes reading your fucking signs about what they can or can't do in exchange for the privilege of entering your sacred premises, they're going to go bowling instead. Get over your bicycles and go down and bend a wrench with a gear-head for a while. Do what he's fucking doing. Maybe he'll learn how to talk to you and vice versa.

But that's like shedding the black uniforms. It's a real psychological barrier to some anarchists, because they've got the solution to the world's problems somehow in code form in their minds. They posit an implicit demand that people are supposed to acknowledge the superiority of their vision as the price of admission. So get the fuck off the university campus and down into a union hall. Put ashtrays on the goddamn tables. Make some babysitting services available. And try to package it in a set of terms that can appeal to the people you're trying to reach. Call it spin if you will, call it packaging, call it Madison Avenue – but how you pedal it, how you try to reach people, is really important. They're probably not about to put safety pins in their eyelids and all the rest of that shit. I understand why you're doing it, and I'm not objecting: it's just that you've got to realize that there are some other people out there you need to reach if you're going to be successful, who don't feel that way. And you need to respect that. Because you're ultimately demanding that they respect you. That's a reciprocal proposition. ★

The Politics of Revolution: Learning from Autonomist Marxism

By Gary Kinsman

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INTRODUCTION: NOT ALL POWER TO CAPITAL

Autonomist Marxism can be seen as a form of Marxism that focuses on developing working class autonomy and power in a capitalist society that is constituted by and through class struggle. One of the strengths of autonomist Marxism is its critique of political economy interpretations of Marxism that end up reifying the social worlds around us, converting what people socially produce into social relationships between things. Most “orthodox” Marxist political economy gives all power to capital and considers workers as victims without power or agency. In my work and writing I have tried to recognize the resistance and agency of the oppressed and how this agency and action obstructs ruling relations, often forcing the elaboration of new strategies of ruling. For me, autonomist Marxism has provided a much firmer basis for this very different reading of Marxism.

In the 1970s, I had a number of close encounters with autonomist Marxism and currents related to it. When I was a young Trotskyist in the Revolutionary Marxist Group in the 1970s I remember debates with members and supporters of the New Tendency (a current in Toronto and Windsor influenced by the Italian New Left and Lotta Continua). I argued, as I had been told, that they were “spontaneists” who didn't grasp the need for a party building approach. Some feminists in the New Tendency became engaged with a wages against housework campaign built from the autonomist Marxist notion of capitalism as a social factory that extended beyond the factory walls. Autonomist Marxist feminists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, and Silvia Federici argued that women doing domestic labour were not only labouring for individual men but also for capital and were participating in producing labour power as a commodity used by capitalists. Looking back on it now, I was quite wrong in my arguments that the problem was “spontaneism” and that domestic labour did not produce value. After leaving the Trotskyist / Leninist left in 1980

because of its refusal to be transformed by feminism and movements for lesbian/gay liberation, I was influenced by Sheila Rowbotham's book *Beyond the Fragments*, particularly her critique of Leninism, and by organizations in England such as Big Flame and the Beyond the Fragments network. Big Flame was also influenced by Lotta Continua and other currents on the Italian left and attempted to prioritize building autonomous class and social struggles ahead of building itself as a revolutionary organization.

NOT JUST ANTONIO NEGRI

In talking about autonomist Marxism it is important not to reduce it to its most famous exponent in the English speaking world, Antonio Negri, co-author of *Empire* and *Multitude*. Despite his important contributions to autonomist Marxism in both the theoretical and activist spheres, it is important to view autonomist Marxism as a political space which contains a number of different trends. What brings these currents together is a commitment to valorizing the working class struggle against capital, an emphasis on the self-organization of the working class, and an opposition to statist conceptions of socialism and communism. Autonomy in autonomist Marxism can be seen as autonomy from both capital and the official leaderships of the trade unions and political parties and the capacity and necessity of groups of workers who experience different oppressions to act autonomously from others (blacks from whites, women from men, queers from straights).

It is important to locate autonomist Marxism in its social and historical contexts as it actually has roots that predate the Italian New Left of the late 1950s and 1960s. One place to start is with the work of C.L.R. James and his associates who focused on the need for working class autonomy and power - including the autonomy of workers from unions and political parties. They based a lot of their theoretical and practical work on learning from workers and the autonomous struggle of black people in the US and around the world. C.L.R. James and the Facing Reality group, who developed a substantial critique of the Leninist vanguard party, also had connections with the ex-Trotskyist Socialisme ou Barbarie group in France, and through this connection, activists in Italy came to be aware of this strand of critical Marxism.

WORKING CLASS STRUGGLES AND THE RETURN TO MARX

This writing and analysis came together in Italy with dissidents in the Communist and Socialist Parties who were focusing on working class struggle and experience and becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the perspectives of their parties, including such writers as Mario Tronti, Raniero Panzieri, Sergio Bologna, and Antonio Negri. This tendency initially described itself as *operaismo* or 'workerism', given its focus on working class experience at the point of production. They focused on working class struggle and autonomy. Based on their extensive contacts with workers, they produced detailed analyses of working class experience and the social organization and re-organization of production. Their theory and practice soon moved outside the factory, but the inter-relation between the development of autonomist Marxism, working class struggles and other movements in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s is important to understand. Autonomist Marxists argued that the working class is not reducible to labour power (a commodity); instead, it is the active force producing capitalism and its internal transformations. This brought about a reversal of "orthodox Marxism" which instead of giving all power to capital considered working class struggle rather than capital as the dynamic, initiating social force of production.

For instance, technological transformations within capitalism have often developed in relation to working class struggles and as attempts to weaken working class struggles and organizing. Many of the initiators of autonomous Marxism went back to Marx's writings on the significance of working class struggles in the social organization of capital. They reminded us that Marx argued that it is workers who are the active agents in producing the new wealth in capitalist societies through the exploitation of surplus value from their labour in the process of production. The initial capitalist strategy of raising the rate of the exploitation of workers through lengthening the working day (increasing the absolute rate of exploitation), was defeated in large part by workers resisting and refusing this strategy. It was the active blocking of this strategy through workers' struggles to limit the length of the working day that led to the strategy of increasing exploitation by technological applications, speeding up production and inventing new forms of "scientific-management." Many autonomist Marxist theorists and activists rediscovered/remembered that capital is a social relation in which the working class is an active component. Working

class struggle is therefore internal to capital (both within and against capital) and carries the possibility of breaking with it.

CLASS COMPOSITION AND CYCLES OF STRUGGLE

Autonomist Marxism has developed a number of important tools for analyzing and thinking through working class struggles. As long as these terms are not understood as monolithic in character and are used in a concrete social and historical sense and are integrated with analyses of gender, racialization, sexuality, ability and other lines of social difference they can be very helpful in our struggles and attempts to theorize working class struggles.

Autonomist Marxist theorists and activists use the expression “working class composition” to refer to the specific forms of social organization of the working class in relation to capital in particular situations. For instance: how integrated is the working class into capitalist relations, how internally divided is the working class, how autonomous is working class activity from capital or how are social relations being subverted in working class struggles of a particular context or period? Unlike in some traditional Marxist contexts, the “working class” is not thought of as an object or a classification, rather it is always in process of becoming and exists in a context of struggle. It is continually changing and in the process of remaking itself and being remade. History and shifting forms of social organization therefore become crucial to grasping working class experience and struggle. Capitalists actively struggle to “decompose” the capacities and strengths of working class composition by exacerbating and re-organizing internal divisions in the working class, ripping apart sources of working class and oppressed people’s power, fragmenting groups and struggles and extending social surveillance. These attempts to destroy working class struggles produce new conditions for the possible re-composition of working class struggle and power.

The continuing process of class composition, decomposition, and re-composition constitutes a “cycle of struggle” within autonomist Marxism. Understanding these cycles of struggle and our positions within them is crucial for evaluating our own sources of power and weakness and for determining how to move forward. For autonomist Marxism the notion of circulation of struggles is used to get at the ways through which different struggles and movements impact on and transform each other, sometimes circulating the most ‘advanced’ forms of struggle across geographical locations and creating important

ruptures with capitalist relations. Autonomist Marxist theorists have differentiated between different forms of the social organization of working class struggle. This includes the organization of skilled craft workers in the early parts of the 20th century, which was in turn decomposed by the organization of “scientific management” and mass production. This process then created the basis for the re-composition of the mass and industrial workers through large scale factory production and ‘scientific management’ of workers in the mid 20th century, a process also linked to the development of the “welfare-state” and Keynesian social and economic policies.

In the 1960s and 1970s autonomist Marxists saw the emergence of the less clearly defined and more diffuse ‘socialized worker’ of the ‘social factory,’ as capitalist production moved beyond factory walls and came to organize and shape community and everyday life through pervasive consumer/state relations. Areas of household and community life also became terrains of class and social struggle against capital involving domestic labour, housing, health, school-work, and sexuality. These struggles included those not only of ‘productive’ labour but also those of ‘reproductive’ labour as capitalist relations were extended to the social organization of desire and consumption. Autonomous struggles of women, lesbians and gay men, people of colour, immigrants, and other oppressed groups who struggle against not only capital but against groups of workers who participate in their oppression and marginalization thus became increasingly visible and disruptive to capitalist social relations. Faced with the struggles against the imposition of work by ‘socialized workers’ capital abandoned the program of the Keynesian ‘welfare-state’ and sought to decompose working class struggles via neo-liberalism and the establishment of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have termed “Empire.”

Autonomist Marxism has shown how differing forms of organization and consciousness emerge in relation to different forms of working class composition and different cycles and circulation of struggles. These forms of organization are historically and socially specific. For instance some autonomist Marxist theorists and historians have pointed out how skilled craft workers often fought to establish more control over their work and how in various ways this led to an emphasis on workers control of production. This also inspired and created the basis for both the various mobilizations associated with Leninism and the vanguard party but also for Council Communism (where liberation was to be achieved through the establishment of

workers councils) which developed a more left challenge to capitalist relations and stressed working class autonomy in the historical context of the early 20th century. While Leninism as an organizational and political practice may have made some sense in these conditions, it no longer does. The mass worker was the basis for the International Workers of the World (IWW) in the USA, for the mass industrial unions in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) later on, and for the struggles in Italy in the late 1960s. In response to these mass concentrations of workers and outbreaks of class struggle capitalists have struggled to decompose and fragment these struggles in part by dismantling the earlier Fordist organization of mass production.

In the period of the ‘socialized’ worker, resistance grows against the imposition of work, struggles expand beyond the narrow point of production into the realm of consumption, while different sections of the working class seek control over home and community life by struggling for ‘self-valorization’. “Self-valorization” is a term used within autonomist Marxism to get at how workers struggles in a broad sense are not only against capitalist relations but are also attempts to create alternative ways of life that overcome capitalist and oppressive relations. Workers struggle not only for autonomy from capital but also for self-valorization in a range of different ways by breaking free from capitalist relations and seeking to build a different way of living. There is a certain commonality here with the notion of prefigurative struggles developed by Sheila Rowbotham in *Beyond the Fragments* where she argued for the need for activists to reimagine a possible future in our struggles and organizing in the present. This development of alternatives to capitalist and oppressive relations, and the emergence of glimpses and moments of experience of a possible future, become crucial in developing our struggles today.

THE CONTINUING IMPACT OF AUTONOMIST MARXISM

In 1976-77 autonomist Marxism became the major force within radical Italian left struggles after the exhaustion of the strategies of the other currents on the revolutionary left. The *autonomia* movement of 1977 was incredibly intense but was unfortunately trapped between the repressive forces of the state on one hand and the political limitations of the urban guerilla approach of the Red Brigades on the other. Thousands of activists were arrested and imprisoned. Since then there has been a major influence of *autonomia* in organizing and

struggles in Italy including the *Tute Bianche* and the *Disobbedienti* in the global justice and social centre movements.

Around the world there is an important influence of *autonomia* and autonomist Marxism in global justice struggles and also among many who are involved in the Open Borders and No One Is Illegal struggles. In Argentina recent struggles have been informed by *autonomia* and autonomist Marxism. The Zapatista revolt has been a major reference point for many activists around the world in developing new ways to struggle against capital that do not sacrifice the autonomy of different oppressed groups. Many of the analytic tools of autonomist Marxism can be very useful in our current struggles and debates. The notion of cycles of struggle can be very useful and the concept of a circulation of struggles that spreads struggles between groups of people who are moving against oppression and exploitation remains key. The struggles of the Zapatistas circulated through the use of the internet (a form of technology developed by capital but able in some ways to be turned against it) and through other social and political networks prevented this revolt from being repressed by the Mexican military and state forces. However, it also created a space for new international forms of organizing against capitalism and oppression. This form of struggle in turn influenced the emergence of a global justice movement in the late 1990s. It has led to the international circulation of experiences through struggles and organizing that pushed forward not only the techniques and levels of struggle but also our abilities to understand and challenge the weak links in global capitalist organization. This also led to the rapid generalization of the experiences of affinity groups, spokes-councils, and direct action politics in many places around the globe including Seattle, Prague, Québec City, Genoa, and Cancun.

During the Mine Mill/Canadian Auto Worker Local 598 strike of 2000-2001 against Falconbridge/Noranda in Sudbury, in which there was considerable rank and file self-activity, a certain heightening of the levels of struggle took place by union militants connecting with union activists in CAW Flying Squads in southern Ontario and activists in CUPE 3903 who had just won a very successful strike against the York university administration (and who brought the slogan “Strike to Win!” to Sudbury), and in a more limited way with the militant anti-poverty activism of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

Facilitating this circulation of struggles was important to furthering anti-capitalist politics. We can see here how the circulation of struggles can be incredibly useful and is built upon our own praxis.

Movements and struggles need to be self-organized but there is also a need for solidarity between different struggles and to learn from each other. All struggles and forms of exploitation/oppression have a mutually constructed or mediated character, being not only autonomous but also organized in and through each other. Within autonomist Marxism, unlike in other Marxist approaches, there is no problem with autonomy and diversity. The goal is to try to develop a politics of difference that transcends antagonisms between different sections of the working class and the oppressed.

While the moment of autonomy is well established in Autonomist Marxism we also need to move beyond autonomy. We need struggles that overcome social contradictions using a “politics of responsibility” approach with those of us in oppressing positions recognizing our own implication within and responsibility to actively challenge relations of oppression. This approach so far remains relatively underdeveloped within autonomist Marxism. At the same time we need to see the multiplication of struggles, the generalization of struggles, and learning from each other in struggle as crucial. Through this process, oppositional and transformative struggles can become unmanageable within the framework of capitalist relations and we can burst beyond these boundaries.

MOVING BEYOND ORGANIZING TO “SEIZE POWER.”

This also means that, like the Zapatistas, we need to refuse the history and traditions of left organizing that seek to “seize state power” and which claim the “leadership” of the working class. These forms of organizing end up replicating all the old shit - relations of hierarchy, command, top-down relations, forms of oppression, and of stifling grass roots and direct action initiatives and creativity. Instead we need to find ways to organize that facilitate and catalyze working class and oppressed people’s self-activity and their own power (“power to” as opposed to “power over,” to use John Holloway’s expression) and to facilitate the circulations of struggles to undercut and deconstruct the ‘power over’ of capital, bureaucratic and state relations, and various forms of oppression. These developments create new spaces for making actual the politics of revolution - but revolution no longer understood as the moment of insurrection, or of “seizing power” but as a long, and ongoing process of contestation and transformation in many different social sites and settings. It is not just capital and the state in a narrow sense that are the problem, but all forms of oppression

and exploitation. An important part of the struggle involves a struggle against ourselves and for the transformation of ourselves since we are also implicated in capitalist relations and quite often relations of oppression (or “power over”).

Crucial to this is the building of new forms of organizing where we can begin to experience and live a sense of what a world defined by direct democracy, without the domination of capital and without forms of oppression will be like, which will give us more energy to carry on the struggle. Of course many questions remain including how to build anti-oppression politics more fully into autonomist Marxism; what the composition of struggles are in Canada and the USA where the ‘war on terror’ has been used relatively successfully to divide and weaken activist movements and struggles; and what struggles are the most important for us to circulate to produce more effective and escalated levels of social struggle. These are some of the questions we need to discuss. But the red threads of autonomous Marxism can allow us to rethink and recreate a politics of revolution for our time. ★

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Anti-Globalization and "Diversity of Tactics"

By *Chris Hurl*

INTRODUCTION

The recent wave of protests that have swept across the world under the banner of "anti-globalization" have recaptured the left's imagination, shattering the illusions of inevitability cast by neo-liberal magicians. The images and slogans from Seattle, Québec City, Prague, and Genoa have become an important legacy, a fresh inspiration to replace the fading images of Weathermen in football helmets. The "new activism," as exemplified in the anti-globalization movement, appears as a paradigm shift away from the politics of stale social democratic parties and small Marxist-Leninist sects awaiting their turn to play vanguard. In contrast to the homogenizing impulse of global capitalism, resistance appears irreducibly plural.

While the anti-globalization movement is often celebrated for its apparent diversity, it often remains unclear how this diversity manifests itself in practice. The ambiguous boundaries of the movement serve to obscure its specific social relationships. Insofar as "diversity" is treated as a thing residing beyond specific social relationships, it is fetishized. In the fragmented and episodic movement of "anti-globalization," diversity is often treated as universal, serving to supplant the organization of specific social practices. I will explore how a "diversity of tactics" emerged as a viable tactical orientation within this new anti-capitalist movement and eventually turned against itself, when the conditions for such diversity no longer existed.

The expression of this "diversity" in the anti-globalization movement has been fundamentally tied to its strategic and tactical orientation. Between the years of 1998 and 2001, hundreds of thousands of people converged on high profile meetings of the ruling elite to protest their neo-liberal program of "free trade" and structural adjustment. Large militant actions exploded from city to city, acronym to acronym, the G8 in Birmingham, the WTO in Seattle, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington DC, the FTAA in Québec City. Through these actions activists have been able to tie these acronyms together to expose an ideological program benefiting a small minority. For a time this minority was left defensive, exasperated,

confused and, backpedaling. This was no small feat and the enormous impression that these protests left on the world is undeniable.

While the “summit hopping” strategy was later criticized for its undue focus on transient, large scale action at the expense of grassroots local organizing, it was precisely for these reasons that the anti-globalization protests were able to garner the attention that they did. These protests brought together diffuse global networks of non-governmental organizations, trade unions, religious groups and the extra-parliamentary left. Through the compression of these networks into the shared time and space of the event, the movement was able to achieve a presence that no single group was able to achieve on its own. Further, these events did much to invigorate an autonomous anti-capitalist movement. With the convergence of significant numbers of radical activists, large scale direct action could be organized and coordinated. Connections were made and networks were formed that still exist today.

The convergence of networks in these events has demanded a great deal of coordination, organization and resources. It has required the organization of a temporary infrastructure that is capable of coordinating legal and medical support, food, housing, media, and other aspects of mobilization. With organizing taking place on such a large scale and encompassing so many transient groups and organizations, no single group has been able to claim a monopoly in organizing. As a February 2000 bulletin of People’s Global Action put it, “There is no centre anywhere that could hope to organize and oversee all this mutual thickening of ties. It would be like trying to instruct a forest how to grow.”¹ In this context, the expression of a “diversity of tactics” did not just make sense, it was unavoidable.

“NONVIOLENT” TERRITORY

In the midst of such diversity, the strategic organization and coordination of action became a daunting task. How could the integrity of action be maintained? The authority of any decision-making body could not be taken for granted. In fact, there was the problem of the elusive outside. There were those who were not included in the decision-making process and, those who were participating in different forms of protest.

Activists sought to ensure the coexistence of multiple strategic and tactical standpoints through the segmentation of the space-time of the event. For example, different “blocs” were exhibited in Prague,

different zones or territories of protest in Québec City and different days of action in Genoa. And yet this segmentation has often not been upheld. The segmentation of space is contingent upon the power of groups to maintain boundaries. The struggle to occupy and transform space has been an antagonistic process.

In fact, the debate around a diversity of tactics erupted in Seattle due to the collapse of boundaries and guidelines for action. The Direct Action Network brought together a number of West Coast activists groups including Earth First!, the Rainforest Action Network, and Art & Revolution, in an attempt to shut down the World Trade Organization meeting through nonviolent direct action. In organizing this action they adopted a standard set of nonviolent guidelines including ‘no property destruction.’ Some activists did not adhere to these guidelines. The Black Bloc, a tactic enabling self-defense and anonymity in militant action, was organized, and it targeted a series of retail outlets, breaking windows and defacing corporate facades.

When faced with property destruction, many activists were quick to dissociate themselves, with some going so far as to form a human chain protecting Nike Town. On several occasions “nonviolent” activists physically confronted activists engaging in property destruction. They publicly condemned these actions and called for the arrest of those involved. Medea Benjamin of Global Exchange was notoriously quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “Here we are protecting Nike, McDonald’s, the Gap and all the while I’m thinking, ‘Where are the police? These anarchists should have been arrested.’”² The organizational form adopted by the Direct Action Network was unable to deal with groups that did not adhere to their guidelines. There was no mechanism in place to deal with difference.

The Direct Action Network had largely adapted its organizational form from the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s and 1980s.³ During those decades, large protests were organized in rural areas against the construction of nuclear power plants. Broad regional coalitions were formed such as the Clamshell Alliance in New England and the Abalone Alliance in California to coordinate these actions. Decisions were made in large assemblies or “spokescouncils” through a consensus process. These assemblies were made up of delegates from various affinity groups bringing together small groups of less than 20 people who shared some kind of familiarity or association with each other.

In a relatively isolated rural context, this organizational model achieved a degree of force and cohesion. A nonviolent position was

established and maintained through a variety of mechanisms. Grounded in a specific region, these organizations were composed of a relatively stable core community of activists. Discipline was largely maintained through networks of affinity groups which formalized communication between all those involved in action because “everyone knows if no one knows you.” Activists were required to participate in nonviolent training and in some cases to sign agreements promising to refrain from violence and property destruction. Activists who did not adhere to nonviolent guidelines were socially ostracized and excluded. In this context, a nonviolent purism developed. By 1986, Ward Churchill wrote, “pacifism, the ideology of nonviolent political action, has become axiomatic and all but universal among more progressive elements of contemporary mainstream North America.”⁴

Of course, this organizational model did not always work, even then. Significant divisions developed as these organizations expanded. In some cases, formal consensus could not be achieved and decision-making moved to a voting model based on a 2/3 or 3/4 majority. The organization of action outside the consensus process became problematic. For instance, the Clamshell Alliance crumbled under criticisms of an informal leadership who were unilaterally making decisions outside of the consensus process. Further, the maintenance of a nonviolent orthodoxy did not curtail the divergence of strategic and tactical orientations. While some activists sought to halt the construction of nuclear power plants through direct action, others feared that this would alienate the rural communities and instead tried to organize demonstrations.

The translation of this model by the Direct Action Network to the organization of direct action in Seattle proved to be quite successful. It enabled the coordination of decentralized groups functioning relatively autonomously to effectively shut down the WTO’s first day of meetings. Groups were organized and networked together on a series of levels, building from affinity groups to affiliated clusters which were then distributed as wedges of a pie encircling the conference centre. Decisions were made in a direct, decentralized and timely fashion and were effectively communicated to other groups enabling the adaptation of action to changing circumstances. With the success of Seattle, this model was reinvigorated and widely applied to actions all over the world.

However, the translation of this organizational model to large scale urban protests was not without its problems. The lack of a clear

correspondence between organizations and the space of action made the maintenance of broad parameters of action untenable. There was no way to ensure that these parameters could be maintained. The Seattle actions brought together a number of disparate groups in a temporary convergence which could no longer be defined organizationally, but led to the coexistence of multiple forms of organization in a shared space and time. With the coexistence of multiple communities in this extensive space, a nonviolent discipline could not be maintained. The Seattle actions reflected the collapse of nonviolent dogma and opened a space for the future “respect for a diversity of tactics.”

FORMALIZATION AND FETISHISM

In the wake of Seattle, debates around tactics often took on an abstract tone. The question of what constitutes “violence” was posed, and while dogmatic pacifists moralistically condemned property destruction, others imbued it with a veneer of liberatory significance of its own. As the ACME Collective argued in their communiqué on the Seattle Black Bloc. “When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights. At the same time, we exercise that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us.”⁵

Insofar as these debates proceeded on a terrain of absolutes, the discussions skirted the question of context. Those arguing for the enforcement of nonviolent guidelines were faced with a context in which nonviolent discipline could no longer be enforced and reacted with condemnation and differentiation. “The revolution we are trying to create didn’t and doesn’t need these parasites,” argued one activist in a *Seattle Weekly* article.⁶ On the other hand, property destruction was often conflated with revolutionary anti-capitalism. It provided a way to seemingly distinguish “reformist” from “revolutionary” tactics. The strategic question of when and where property destruction could be effectively utilized was often left unanswered.

In the emerging context, a rigid nonviolent position prohibiting property destruction was widely recognized to be untenable. There was a demand for more flexible ways of organizing and evaluating action. Recognizing that their original hallmark calling for “nonviolent civil disobedience” did not sufficiently take into account the distinct connotations that this term would take in different parts of the world. The PGA network clarified its position at Cochabamba in September

2001: “[T]here was always an understanding in PGA,” it was argued, “that nonviolence has to be understood as a guiding principle or ideal which must always be understood relative to the particular political and cultural situation.” There was a concern that advocating a strictly “nonviolent” perspective could potentially marginalize and criminalize a whole segment of activists and deny the history of people’s struggles in many parts of the world. As a result, the language shifted from “nonviolent civil disobedience” to a call for “forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples’ rights.”⁷

With the coexistence of multiple groups pursuing their own actions in a shared space, there was a demand to regiment action in a more flexible way. No single group could set such guidelines for action. Thus, a limit was placed on the organizational form. If a group could not enforce parameters for action, then how did groups handle disagreements over tactics? In reflecting on the Seattle protests Michael Albert argued:

I think that what modestly (as compared to “seriously”) impaired the movement’s ability to get on with growing and struggling was a very real division over tactics and that that division in this case was handled poorly largely due to a lack of mechanisms for dealing with disagreement. I think a priority task ought to be to develop and agree on such mechanisms, so that we don’t suffer such problems again in the future, or even see them get worse.

The call to respect a “diversity of tactics” reflected the inauguration of a more flexible regimentation of action, allowing for disagreements over tactics without falling into public condemnation or criminalization. Such condemnation was seen by many as divisive, contributing to the distinctions drawn in the corporate media between “good” and “bad” protesters. The call to “respect a diversity of tactics” was first and foremost a call for solidarity, respectfully disagreeing with other activists rather than demanding their arrest.

The events in Seattle presented a model for action that was widely adopted by activists in North America and Europe. Everywhere activists tried to organize the “next Seattle.” For radicals this meant disrupting the meetings of world leaders wherever they went. Black Blocs became a more common sight in protests. Trade union leaders continued to steer their marches away from any sign of confrontation and into empty parking lots, while non-governmental organizations organized counter-summits parallel to the meetings of the ruling class,

eventually culminating in the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre in September 2001. The drive to maintain momentum demanded that everyone put aside their differences and just keep on doing what they were doing. At times this culminated in the uncritical valorization of differences, the liberal misconception that our actions will be most effective if everyone does their own thing.

With the diffusion of this model across North America, a “respect for a diversity of tactics” was widely adopted by activists. The call for a “diversity of tactics” reverberated in a series of local militant actions. And yet the translation of this model to other contexts was often ill-suited, but nevertheless taken for granted. While the shutdown in Seattle was accomplished through a well coordinated strategy with a little help from unsuspecting authorities, the implementation of this model in other contexts was anticipated by both activists and authorities. While this contributed to widespread participation in militant direct action, it also contributed to its containment.

ANTI-CAPITALISM IN DIVERSITY

The next major action following Seattle was organized for April 16, 2000 (A16) against the IMF and World Bank meetings in Washington DC. Largely emulating the organizational form of the Direct Action Network, a broad coalition of activists came together under the name Mobilization for Global Justice (Mob4glob) to organize for this event. The group continued to utilize a consensus model in which decisions would be made by affinity groups coordinated through spokescouncil assemblies. Mob4glob also attempted to set guidelines for action reinforcing a commitment to nonviolence and specifically ‘no property destruction.’ In response to such guidelines, a number of anarchist and libertarian socialist groups issued a call for a Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc.

We believe that the most effective protest is each group autonomously taking action and using tactics that they feel work best for their situation. We do not advocate one particular tactic but believe that the greatest diversity of tactics is the most effective use of tactics. We are critical of ideologically motivated arguments that oppose this. This is why we do not believe that it is organizationally principled for any one group to set the guidelines for the protests or claim ownership of the movement.⁹

This call for a “diversity of tactics” was part of a broader push for the autonomous organization of revolutionary anti-capitalists in North America. It put to rest the pretension that any single group could set parameters for action, while at the same time declaring the presence of a distinctly “anti-capitalist” formation that would exist outside these parameters. On the one hand the “bloc” appeared as a hub for militant direct action, on the other hand it espoused the idea that the “greatest diversity of tactics is the most effective use of tactics.” On this basis, the presence of diversity was considered effective in itself. The strategic focus of the revolutionary anti-capitalists remained unclear.

It should not be presumed that the push for an autonomous anti-capitalist bloc entailed a split from Mob4glob and other progressive groups. Throughout these protests there had been considerable cooperation and crossover between revolutionary anti-capitalists and left liberals in the institutional left. In Seattle, the contribution of financial and administrative resources by non-governmental organizations, not to mention the breakaway by thousands of trade unionists from the official labour march contributed to the successful shutdown of the meetings. In organizing for the A16 actions in Washington DC many activists participated in both the Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc and Mob4glob. While Mob4glob did not openly condone property destruction, there was a degree of solidarity and tacit support for the pursuit of more militant actions through autonomous anti-capitalist organization. At a press conference leading up to the action Mob4glob organizer Nadine Bloch asserted:

We want to focus on the issues of structural violence against people by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, rather than get mired down in discussions about tactics, because we know that everybody who’s going to be out on the street is going to be there because they’re motivated by the same great feeling of anger and frustration about the ability to set their future direction in this world and stand up for environmental rights and human dignity.¹⁰

This reflected a relatively common position. There was a desire not to get bogged down in divisive arguments over tactics in order to keep up the momentum of the movement.

A16 showed that Seattle was not just a glitch. Nearly 40,000 people from a wide range of backgrounds came together in protest.

Government offices were closed and bureaucrats were told not to go to work. Within this action a visible and widely supported anti-capitalist movement solidified. Anti-capitalists played an important role in organizing militant action, self-defense and jail solidarity. Yet the effectiveness of more militant tactics in DC remained limited. Anticipating the attempted shutdown of the meeting, delegates to the IMF and World Bank meetings were brought in early. When the activists’ plans to block intersections were thwarted, it became unclear how to proceed. Some activists decided to join the large mass demonstration while others attempted to maintain a lockdown on various intersections. With a lack of a strategic focus or coordinated plan of action, activists marched aimlessly around the city, occasionally knocking over newspaper boxes.

ANTI-CAPITALISTS LEAD THE WAY

Building to the Québec City protests against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), the anti-capitalist movement gained widespread support and acceptance amongst activists. In many circles, “anti-capitalism” even supplanted that ugly term “anti-globalization” in describing the movement. Yet the fortunes of the anti-capitalist movement remained closely tied to the successful translation of “diversity of tactics” within a regime for action derived at a specific moment, in a specific context. Since Seattle, the debate around a “diversity of tactics” had emerged in many different contexts and was translated into many different actions.

In Montreal, the rift manifested itself most clearly in “Operation SalAMI,” a coalition of activists who came together in opposition to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).¹¹ SalAMI was organized as a nonhierarchical collective based on the principles of training, transparency, and nonviolent action. This group would surface in May 1998 in its blockade of an MAI meeting in Montreal. However, many activists would leave the group frustrated with SalAMI’s informal and unaccountable leadership and its dogmatic nonviolent position.¹²

Many of these activists would come together again in the Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitaliste (CLAC) to organize actions against the FTAA meeting in Québec City in April 2001. CLAC brought together a broad network of activists committed to anti-capitalism and organized through assemblies bringing together a network of affinity groups. They adopted a basis for unity that included

a “respect for a diversity of tactics” ranging from “popular education to direct action.”

In contrast to A16, where the revolutionary anti-capitalist bloc was tied together in militant direct action and protest, the basis for unity adopted by CLAC provided a space where anti-capitalists could meet beyond such actions. It was an anti-capitalist stance rather than any specific mode of action that tied CLAC together. This gave CLAC more staying power as compared with the temporary “bloc” organizations at A16. In fact, CLAC continues to participate in anti-capitalist organizing in Montreal today.

Nevertheless, the centrality of anti-capitalism in Québec City remained tied to specific circumstances of action. Here, the regime for action that had been developing since Seattle would work well. In order to ensure that people could decide on their own level of involvement in protests, there were attempts to segment space into different protest zones. However, these zones quickly broke down as confrontations intensified. A shared hatred of the fence encircling the conference centre and a large portion of the city drove thousands of activists to wade into the tear-gas-saturated streets in attempts to disrupt the meetings. Activists were united in facing this looming target.

These militant actions gained widespread support from the more liberal elements of the movement, not to mention the local population. Notably, Maude Barlow from the Council of Canadians, who had previously condemned the use of more militant tactics,¹³ acknowledged a space for these tactics in her speech in Québec City. Rather than calling for the arrest of more militant demonstrators as she did in Seattle, Barlow acknowledged that it was not for her to try to control or regulate protesters. “There was some vandalism yesterday, yes,” she argued, “but where was the first vandalism? The first vandalism was in that scar of a wall they put up in our beautiful city. That wall was the first vandalism.”¹⁴

CHANGING CONTEXTS

By the time of the G8 meeting in Kananaskis took place, the context for organizing had changed significantly. Even prior to 9/11, activists in the global North faced intensifying repression. In June 2001, protests against the European Union summit in Gothenburg, Sweden were met with live ammunition and in July, Carlos Guiliani was murdered while protesting the G8 in Genoa. Police directly targeted

the more liberal elements with police violence while at the same time infiltrating more militant groups using *agents-provocateurs* in attempts to fragment the movement. However, keeping protests under wraps became less of a concern as the ruling class began meeting in remote locations such as Qatar and Kananaskis.

The events of 9/11 took the wind out of the sails of the anti-globalization movement. Prior to 9/11, the call to respect for a “diversity of tactics” had tied together a wide range of activists in a broad movement against capitalism. But in an emerging context of police repression and patriotism, the call to respect a “diversity of tactics” rang hollow. With the looming threat of terrorism, legislation was passed in the Canadian state and the United States granting the police and security agencies extensive powers. The line between direct action and terrorism became increasingly and intentionally blurred, and many groups backed away from mass mobilizations altogether. The next large scale mobilizations, scheduled to take place in Washington DC at the end of September against the IMF and World Bank, were canceled.

The mountain fortress of Kananaskis, surrounded by an interminable series of security checkpoints, provided a daunting task for those seeking to disrupt the meeting. The surrounding area was sparsely populated and extremely conservative. In Alberta, activists could expect little support from the locals. In fact, the city of Calgary, where action would be organized, denied even requests for space in the city parks. Moreover, civil liberties were being rampantly curtailed under the pretense of a looming terrorist threat. Snipers were given orders to shoot on sight.

In this context, the model for action derived from Seattle no longer proved to be effective. As Starhawk argued,

The recent protests in Alberta against the G8, the heads of the eight most industrialized countries, are an example of what happens when we apply organizing models that don't actually fit the situation we're in. When we cook for a hotter fire than we actually have, we end up with porridge that is colder than it needs to be.¹⁵

In organizing for this action, Alberta activists came together in an “Anti-Capitalist Caucus” calling for a “respect for a diversity of tactics.” Yet what “anti-capitalism” or “diversity of tactics” meant in this context remained unclear. Unable to effectively disrupt the

G8 meetings, activists instead attempted to organize a snake march aiming at economic disruption in downtown Calgary.

In Kananaskis, the call for a “diversity of tactics” was detached from a context where it could serve as a coherent strategy. While in Québec City, the callout for a “diversity of tactics” entailed a clear strategic target for militant direct action, in Calgary there was no clear connection between direct action and an articulated strategic aim. The push to direct action imploded in a series of spectacles aimed to shock. “Disruption” was fetishized, serving as a means of personal catharsis that was deemed effective in and for itself. Some activists chose to strip naked in front of The Gap. Others organized a game of “anarchist soccer” in the streets. While the expression of militant direct action in other contexts was able to draw support from other activists, the local population, and the general public, in this case the fetishization of “disruption” served to marginalize activists from the communities that they were trying to reach.

CONCLUSION

The call for a “diversity of tactics” was interjected at a vital moment, breaking a liberal hegemony and helping to build a nascent revolutionary anti-capitalist movement in North America. It provided a means of contesting nonviolent dogma and entrenched a new repertoire for action that included more confrontational tactics. It enabled the establishment of a extensive solidarity *between* groups rather than an intensive solidarity *within* groups predicated on the fetishization of nonviolence. Yet this way of organizing action was fundamentally tied to the particular context of its emergence. The call for a diversity of tactics emerged through the organization of militant direct action in large urban centers seeking to disrupt the meetings of the ruling class. In the absence of such a context the call for a diversity of tactics often becomes fetishized.

While there has been a great deal of emphasis on the presence of “diversity” in the recent wave of protests, the manner in which this “diversity” has concretely coalesced in action is often forgotten. In fact, the presence of an autonomous “anti-capitalist movement” in North America has largely been restricted to spectacular mass actions. As the summit hopping strategy has become less tenable, activists have focused on organizing in their own cities. Yet the presence of anti-capitalism as a strong autonomous movement in many local communities remains limited. While anti-capitalists are certainly active

in a whole host of other activities, we remain fragmented precisely insofar as we are organized in decentralized networks *without* any points of convergence and insofar as we have not drawn continuities beyond these large-scale mass actions. We remain fragmented insofar as we are unified by militant direct action rather than coherent theory and analysis. As such, our actions are often subordinated under a liberal “progressive” hegemony. The task for revolutionary anti-capitalists today is to develop new forms of convergence that move beyond ephemeral actions and the rhetoric of “diversity.” ★

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NOTES:

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³Epstein, B. (1991). *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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⁴Churchill, W. (1998). *Pacifism as Pathology*. Winnipeg: Artbeiter Ring, 29.

⁵Acme Collective. (December 4, 1999). “N30 Black Bloc Communiqué.” http://www.geocities.com/kk_abacus/ACME.html

⁶Parrish, G. (Dec. 9-15, 1999). “Anarchists, go home!” In *Seattle Weekly* <http://www.seattleweekly.com/features/9949/features-parrish.shtml>.

⁷Hallmarks of Peoples’ Global Action, changed at the 3rd PGA Conference in Cochabamba <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agn/free/pga/hallm.htm>

⁸Albert, M. (1999). “Response to Katsiaticas.” <http://www.zmag.org/replytokats.htm>

⁹“A16 Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc Statement.” (2000). http://www.infoshop.org/news5/a16_call.html

¹⁰<http://www.sinkers.org/a16/kickoff/>

¹¹“SalAMI” is a play on words meaning “dirty friend” or “dirty MAI” in French.

¹²Conway, J. (2003). “Civil Resistance and the ‘Diversity of Tactics’ in Anti-Globalization Movement: Problems of Violence, Silence, and Solidarity in Activist Politics,” In *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* (2/3), 519. <http://www.yorku.ca/ohlj/english/volume/vol41.html>

¹³Reflecting on the Seattle protests, Barlow and Clarke argued, “To the distress of local residents and peaceful demonstrators, the police did not arrest these people, but they used the media’s property-damage images to justify their brutal crackdown against the peaceful majority” (Barlow & Clarke, 2001, 13).

¹⁴Reprinted in *The Nation*, May 28, 2001, <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20010521&cs=barlow20010508>

¹⁵<http://www.starhawk.org/activism/activism-writings/tacticsright.html>.

Sex, Race and Class

by Selma James

Selma James is an organizer with the Crossroads Women’s Centre in London, England. Her activism reaches back to the 1950s when she participated in the Johnson-Forest Tendency, (along with CLR James, Raya Dunayevskaya, Marty Glaberman and Grace Lee Boggs. She is well known for critiquing the short-comings of orthodox Marxist political economy which fails to account for the ways in which women’s unpaid, yet socially necessary, labour is appropriated by capital. This critical insight has animated her ongoing work in the Wages for Housework Campaign and the Global Women’s Strike. Selma James continues to be a central figure in the debates around the role of housework in the reproduction of labour power and the basis of capitalist profit. For more information about some of the work that Selma is involved with please check out <http://www.crossroadswomen.net/WFH.html> and www.globalwomensstrike.net.

There has been enough confusion generated when sex, race and class have confronted each other as separate and even conflicting entities. That they are separate entities is self-evident. That they have proven themselves to be not separate, even inseparable, is harder to discern. Yet if sex and race are pulled away from class, virtually all that remains is the truncated, provincial, sectarian politics of the white male metropolitan Left. I hope to show in barest outline, first, that the working class movement is something other than what that Left has ever envisioned it to be, and second, that locked within the contradiction between the discrete entities of sex or race and the totality of class is the greatest deterrent to working class power and at the same time the creative energy to achieve that power.

In our pamphlet which Avis Brown so generously referred to,¹ we tackled “the relation of women to capital and [the] kind of struggle we [can] effectively wage to destroy it,” and drew throughout on the experience of the struggle against capital by Black people. Beginning with the female (caste) experience, we redefined class to include women. That redefinition was based on the unwaged labour of the housewife. We put it this way:

Since Marx, it has been clear that capital rules and develops through the wage, that is, that the foundation of capitalist society was the wage labourer and his or her direct exploitation. What has been neither clear nor assumed by the organizations of the working class movement is that precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage labourer been organized. This exploitation has been

even more effective because the lack of a wage hid it... Where women are concerned their labour appears to be a personal service outside of capital.²

But if the relation of caste to class where women are concerned presents itself in a hidden, mystified form, this mystification is not unique to women. Before we confront race, let us take an apparent diversion.

The least powerful in the society are our children, also unwaged in a wage labour society. They were once (and in tribal society for example still are) accepted as an integral part of the productive activity of the community. The work they did was part of the total social labour and was acknowledged as such. Where capital is extending or has extended its rule, children are taken away from others in the community and forced to go to schools, against which the number of rebels is growing daily. Is their powerlessness a class question? Is their struggle against school the class struggle? We believe it is. Schools are institutions organized by capital to achieve its purpose through and against the child.

Capital... sent them to school not only because they are in the way of others' more "productive" labour or only to indoctrinate them. The rule of capital through the wage compels every able bodied person to function, under the law of division of labour, and to function in ways that are if not immediately, then ultimately profitable to the expansion and extension of the rule of capital. That, fundamentally, is the meaning of school. Where children are concerned, their labour appears to be learning for their own benefit.³

So here are two sections of the working class whose activities, one in the home, the other in the school, appear to be outside of the capitalist wage labour relation because the workers themselves are wageless. In reality, their activities are facets of capitalist production and its division of labour.

The first, housewives, are involved in the production and (what is the same thing) reproduction of workers, what Marx calls labour power. They service those who are daily destroyed by working for wages and who need to be daily renewed; and they care for and discipline those who are being prepared to work when they grow up.

The other, children, are those who from birth are the objects of this care and discipline, who are trained in homes, in schools and in front of the T.V. to be future workers. But this has two aspects.

In the first place, for labour power to be reproduced in the form of children, these children must be coerced into accepting discipline and especially the discipline of working, of being exploited in order to be able to eat. In addition, however, they must be disciplined and trained to perform a certain kind of work. The labour that capital wants done is divided and each category parceled out internationally as the life work, the destiny, the identity of specific sets of workers. The phrase often used to describe this is the international division of labour. We will say more of this later, but for now let the West Indian mother of a seven-year-old sum up her son's education with precision: "They're choosing the street sweepers now."

Those of us in the feminist movement who have torn the final veil away from this international capitalist division of labour to expose women's and children's class position, which was hidden by the particularity of their caste position, learnt a good deal of this from the Black movement. It is not that it is written down anywhere (though we discovered later it was, in what would seem to some a strange place.) A mass movement teaches less by words than by the power it exercises which, clearing away the debris of appearances, tells it like it is.

Just as the women's movement being "for" women and the rebellion of children being "for" children, appears at first not to be about class, the Black movement in the US (and elsewhere) also began by adopting what appeared to be only a caste position in opposition to the racism of white male-dominated groups. Intellectuals in Harlem and Malcolm X, that great revolutionary, who were nationalists, both appeared to place colour above class when the white Left were still chanting variations of "Black and white unite and fight," or "Negroes and Labour must join together." The Black working class was able through this nationalism to redefine class: overwhelmingly, Black and Labour were synonymous (with no other group was Labour as synonymous, except perhaps with women). The demands of Blacks and the forms of struggle created by Blacks were the most comprehensive working class struggle.

It is not, then, that the Black movement "wandered off into the class struggle," as Avis says. It was the class struggle and this took a while to sink into our consciousness. Why?

One reason is because some of us wore the blinkers of the white male Left, whether we knew it or not. According to them, if the

struggle's not in the factory, it's not the class struggle. The real bind was that this Left assured us they spoke in the name of Marxism. They threatened that if we broke from them, organizationally or politically, we were breaking with Marx and scientific socialism. What gave us the boldness to break, fearless of the consequences, was the power of the Black movement. We found that redefining class went hand-in-hand with rediscovering a Marx that Left would never understand.

There were deeper reasons too why caste and class seemed contradictory. It appears often that the interests of Blacks are contradicted by the interests of whites, and it is similar with men and women. To grasp the class interest when there seems not one but two, three, four, each contradicting the other, is one of the most difficult revolutionary tasks, in theory and practice, that confronts us.

Another source of confusion is that not all women, children or Black men are working class. This is only to say that within the movements are layers whose struggle tends to be aimed at moving up in the capitalist hierarchy rather than at destroying it. And so within each movement there is a struggle about which class interest the movement will serve. But this is the history also of white male workers' movements. There is no class "purity," not even in shop floor organizations. The struggle by workers against organizations they formed there and in the society generally, trade unions, Labour parties, etc., is the class struggle.⁴

Let's put the relation of caste to class another way. The word "culture" is often used to show that class concepts are narrow, philistine, inhuman. Exactly the opposite is the case. A national culture which has evolved over decades or centuries may appear to deny that society's relation to international capitalism. It is a subject too wide to go into deeply here but one basic point can be quickly clarified.

The life-style, unique to themselves, which a people develop once they are enmeshed by capitalism, in response to and in rebellion against it, cannot be understood at all except as the totality of their capitalist lives. To delimit culture is to reduce it to a decoration of daily life.⁵ Culture is plays and poetry about the exploited; ceasing to wear mini-skirts and taking to trousers instead; the clash between the soul of Black Baptism and the guilt and sin of white Protestantism. Culture is also the shrill of the alarm clock that rings at 6a.m. when a Black woman in London wakes her children to get them ready for the baby minder. Culture is how cold she feels at the bus stop and then how hot in the crowded bus. Culture is how you feel on Monday

morning at eight when you clock in, wishing it was Friday, wishing your life away. Culture is the speed of the line or the weight and smell of dirty hospital sheets, and you meanwhile thinking of what to make for tea that night. Culture is making the tea while your man watches the news on the T.V.

And culture is an "irrational woman" walking out of the kitchen into the sitting room and without a word turning off the T.V. "for no reason at all."

From where does this culture spring which is so different from a man's, if you are a woman, and different too from a white woman's if you are a Black woman? Is it auxiliary to the class struggle (as the white Left would have it) or is it more fundamental to the class struggle (as Black nationalists and radical feminists would have it) because it is special to your sex, your race, your age, your nationality and the moment in time when you are these things?

Our identity, our social roles, the way we are seen, appears to be disconnected from our capitalist functions. To be liberated from them (or through them) appears to be independent from our liberation from capitalist wage slavery. In my view, identity-caste is the very substance of class.

Here is the "strange place" where we found the key to the relation of class to caste written down most succinctly. Here is where the international division of labour is posed as power relationships within the working class. It is Volume I of Marx's Capital.

Manufacture... develops a hierarchy of labour powers, to which there corresponds a scale of wages. If, on the one hand, the individual labourers are appropriated and annexed for life by a limited function; on the other hand, the various operations of the hierarchy are parceled out among the labourers according to both their natural and their acquired capabilities.⁶

In two sentences is laid out the deep material connection between racism, sexism, national chauvinism and the chauvinism of the generations who are working for wages against children and old age pensioners who are wageless, who are dependents. A hierarchy of labour powers and scale of wages to correspond.

Racism and sexism train us to develop and acquire certain capabilities at the expense of all others. Then these acquired capabilities are taken to be our nature and fix our functions for life, and fix also the quality of our mutual relations. So planting cane or

tea is not a job for white people and changing nappies is not a job for men and beating children is not violence. Race, sex, age, nation, each is an indispensable element of the international division of labour. Our feminism bases itself on a hitherto invisible stratum of the hierarchy of labour powers-the housewife-to which there corresponds no wage at all.

To proceed on the basis of a hierarchical structure among waged and unwaged slavery is not, as Avis accuses the working class of doing, "concentrating... exclusively on the economic determinants of the class struggle." The work you do and the wages you receive are not merely "economic" but social determinants, determinants of social power. It is not the working class but organizations which claim to be of and for that class which reduce the continual struggle for social power by that class into "economic determinants," such as greater capitalist control for a pittance more a week. Wage rises that unions negotiate often turn out to be standstills or even cuts, either through inflation or through more intense exploitation (often in the form of productivity deals) which more than pay the capitalist back for the rise. And so people assume that this was the intention of workers in demanding, for example, more wages, more money, more "universal social power," in the words of Marx.

The social power relations of the sexes, races, nations and generations are precisely, then, particularized forms of class relations. These power relations within the working class weaken us in the power struggle between the classes. They are the particularized forms of indirect rule, one section of the class colonizing another, and through this, capital imposing its own will on us all. One of the reasons why these so-called working class organizations have been so able to mediate the struggle is that we have, internationally, allowed them to isolate "the working class," which they identify as white, male and over 21, from the rest of us. The unskilled white male worker, an exploited human being who is increasingly disconnected from capital's perspective for him to work, to vote, to participate in its society, he also, racist and sexist though he is, recognizes himself as the victim of these organizations. But housewives, Blacks, young people, workers from the Third World, excluded from the definition of class, have been told that their confrontation with the white male power structure in the metropolis is an "exotic historical accident." Divided by the capitalist organization of society into factory, office, school, plantation, home

and street, we are divided too by the very institutions which claim to represent our struggle collectively as a class.

In the metropolis, the Black movement was the first section of the class massively to take its autonomy from these organizations, and to break away from the containment of the struggle only to 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.

The women's movement was the next major movement of the class in the metropolis to find for itself a power base outside the factory as well as in it. Like the Black movement before it, to be organizationally autonomous of capital and its institutions, women and their movement had also to be autonomous of that part of the "hierarchy of labour powers" which capital used specifically against them. For Blacks it was whites. For women it was men. For Black women it is both.

Strange to think that even today, when confronted with the autonomy of the Black movement or the autonomy of the women's movement, there are those who talk about this "dividing the working class." Strange indeed when our experience has told us that in order for the working class to unite in spite of the divisions which are inherent in its very structure- factory versus plantation versus home versus schools- those at the lowest levels of the hierarchy must themselves find the key to their weakness, must themselves find the strategy which will attack that point and shatter it, must themselves find their own modes of struggle.

The Black movement has not in our view "integrated into capitalism's plural society" (though many of its "leaders" have), it has not "been subsumed to white working class strategy." (Here I think Avis is confusing white working class struggle with trade union/Labour party strategy. They are mortal enemies, yet they are often taken as identical). The Black movement has in the United States, on the contrary, challenged and continues to challenge the most powerful capitalist state in the world. The most powerful at home and abroad. When it burnt down the centres of that metropolis and challenged all constituted authority, it made a way for the rest of the working class everywhere to move in its own specific interests. We women moved. This is neither an accident nor the first time events have moved in this sequence.

It is not an accident because when constituted power was confronted, a new possibility opened for all women. For example, the daughters of men to whom was delegated some of this power saw

through the noble mask of education, medicine and the law for which their mothers had sacrificed their lives. Oh yes, marriage to a man with a good salary would be rewarded by a fine house to be imprisoned in, and even a Black servant; they would have privilege for as long as they were attached to that salary which was not their own. But power would remain in the hands of the white male power structure. They had to renounce the privilege even to strike out for power. Many did. On the tide of working class power which the Black movement had expressed in the streets, and all women expressed in the day-to-day rebellion in the home, the women's movement came into being.

It is not the first time either that a women's movement received its impetus from the exercise of power by Black people. The Black slave who formed the Abolitionist Movement and organized the Underground Railroad for the escape to the North also gave white women, and again the more privileged of them, a chance, an occasion to transcend the limitations in which the female personality was imprisoned. Women, trained always to do for others, left their homes not to free themselves- that would have been outrageous- but to free "the slave." They were encouraged by Black women, ex-slaves like Sojourner Truth, who suffered because, being women, they had been the breeders of labour power on the plantation. But once those white women had taken their first decisive step out of the feminine mould, they confronted more sharply their own situation. They had to defend their right, as women, to speak in public against slavery. They were refused, for example, seating at the Abolitionist conference of 1840 in London because they were women. By 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, they called their own conference, for women's rights. There was a male speaker. He was a leading Abolitionist. He had been a slave. His name was Frederick Douglass.

And when young white women headed South on the Freedom Ride buses in the early 60s of this century and discovered that their male (white and Black) comrades had a special place for them in the hierarchy of struggle, as capital had in the hierarchy of labour power, history repeated itself- almost. This time it was not for the vote but for a very different goal that they formed a movement. It was a movement for liberation.

The parallels that are drawn between the Black and women's movements can always turn into an 11-plus: who is more exploited? Our purpose here is not parallels. We are seeking to describe that complex interweaving of forces which is the working class; we are

seeking to break down the power relations among us on which is based the hierarchical rule of international capital. For no man can represent us as women any more than whites can speak about and themselves end the Black experience. Nor do we seek to convince men of our feminism. Ultimately they will be "convinced" by our power. We offer them what we offer the most privileged women: power over their enemies. The price is an end to their privilege over us.

The strategy of feminist class struggle is, as we have said, based on the wageless woman in the home. Whether she also works for wages outside the home, her labour of producing and reproducing the working class weighs her down, weakens her capacity to struggle, she doesn't even have time. Her position in the wage structure is low especially but not only if she is Black. And even if she is relatively well placed in the hierarchy of labour powers (rare enough!), she remains defined as a sexual object of men. Why? Because as long as most women are housewives part of whose function in reproducing labour power is to be the sexual object of men, no woman can escape that identity. We demand wages for the work we do in the home. And that demand for a wage from the state is, first, a demand to be autonomous of men on whom we are now dependent. Secondly, we demand money without working out of the home, and open for the first time the possibility of refusing forced labour in the factories and in the home itself.

It is here in this strategy that the lines between the revolutionary Black and the revolutionary feminist movements begin to blur. This perspective is founded on the least powerful, the wageless. Reinforcing capital's international division of labour is a standing army of unemployed who can be shunted from industry to industry, from country to country. The Third World is the most massive repository of this industrial reserve army. (The second most massive is the kitchen in the metropolis.) Port of Spain, Calcutta, Algiers, the Mexican towns south of the US border are the labour power for shitwork in Paris, London, Frankfurt and the farms of California and Florida. What is their role in the revolution? How can the wageless struggle without the lever of the wage and the factory? We do not give the answers, we can't. But we pose the questions in a way which assumes that the unemployed have not to go to work in order to subvert capitalist society.

Housewives working without a pay packet in the home may also have a job outside of their homes. The subordination of the wage of the man in the home and the subordinating nature of that labour

weaken the woman wherever else she is working, and regardless of race. Here is the basis for Black and white women to act together, “supported” or “unsupported,” not because the antagonism of race is overcome, but because we both need the autonomy that the wage and the struggle for the wage can bring. Black women will know in what organizations (with Black men, with white women, with neither) to make that struggle. No one else can know.

We don’t agree with Avis that “the Black American struggle failed to fulfill its potential as a revolutionary vanguard...,” if by “vanguard” is meant the basic propellant of class struggle in a particular historical situation. It has used the “specificity of its experience” as a nation and as a class both at once to redefine class and the class struggle itself. Perhaps the theoreticians have not, but then they must never be confused with the movement. Only as a vanguard could that struggle have begun to clarify the central problem of our age, the organizational unity of the working class internationally as we now perceive and define it.

It is widely presumed that the Vanguard Party on the Leninist model embodies that organizational unity. Since the Leninist model assumes a vanguard expressing the total class interest, it bears no relation to the reality we have been describing, where no one section of the class can express the experience and interest of, and pursue the struggle for, any other section. The formal organizational expression of a general class strategy does not yet anywhere exist.

Let me refer finally to a letter written against one of the organizations of the Italian extra-parliamentary Left who, when we had a feminist symposium in Rome last year and excluded men, called us fascists and attacked us physically.

The traditional attack on the immigrant worker, especially but not exclusively if he or she is Black (or Southern Italian), is that her presence threatens the gains of the native working class. Exactly the same is said about women in relation to men. The anti-racist (i.e. anti-nationalist and anti-sexist) point of view, the point of view of struggle, is to discover the organizational weakness which permits the most powerful sections of the class to be divided from the less powerful, thereby allowing capital to play on this division, defeating us. The question is, in fact, one of the basic questions which the class faces today. Where Lenin divided the class between the advanced and the backward, a subjective division, we see the division along the lines of capitalist organization, the more powerful and the less powerful. It is

the experience of the less powerful that when workers in a stronger position (that is, men with a wage in relation to women without one, or whites with a higher wage than Blacks) gain a “victory,” it may not be a victory for the weaker and even may represent a defeat for both. For in the disparity of power within the class is precisely the strength of capital.

How the working class will ultimately unite organizationally, we don’t know. We do know that up to now many of us have been told to forget our own needs in some wider interest which was never wide enough to include us. And so we have learnt by bitter experience that nothing unified and revolutionary will be formed until each section of the exploited will have made its own autonomous power felt.

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class. ★

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NOTES:

¹ “The Colony of the Colonized: notes on Race, Class and Sex,” Avis Brown, *Race Today*, June 1973. The writer refers to *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (Falling Wall Press, Bristol 1972), as “brilliant.” The third edition was published as a book in 1975. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from *Power of Women*, 1975. (We were later to learn that Avis Brown was a pseudonym for A. Sivanandan, a man who is now head of the Institute of Race Relations, London.) Sex, Race and Class, the reply to “Avis Brown,” was first published in *Race Today*, January 1974.

² p.28

³ p.28

⁴ For an analysis of the antagonistic relationship between workers and trade unions see S. James, *Women, The Unions and Work, or What is Not to be Done*, first published in 1972, republished with a new Postscript, Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1976.

⁵ For the best demystification of culture I know which shows, for example, how West Indian cricket has carried in its heart racial and class conflicts, see C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, Hutchinson, London 1963. 4. From a letter by Lotta Feminista and the International Feminist Collective, reprinted in *L'Offensiva*, Musolini, Turin, 1972 (pp. 18-19). I wrote the paragraph quoted here.

⁶ Karl Marx. *Capital*, Volume I. Moscow, 1958: p. 349

Roundtable on Anti-Oppression Politics in Anti-Capitalist Movements

Edited by Sharmeen Khan

The modes of resistance and struggle that came out of liberation movements in the latter part of the 20th century gave rise to anti-oppression organizing and politics. Anti-oppression arose out of the left's failure to develop a nuanced approach to questions of oppression and to consider various forms of oppression as "class issues."

In recent years the rise of the anti-globalization movement has influenced, and been influenced by, anti-oppression analyses, as the movement sought to address the effects of global capitalism on different communities and peoples, and to understand the varied effects of power, privilege and marginalization in individual communities, as well as in national and international contexts.

Among social justice activists organizing around anti-oppression politics, many questions have come up as to how to envision and create a transformative politic around issues of racism, sexism, heterosexism and able-ism within an anti-capitalist analysis. The current separation of identity politics from class struggle does not speak to the experiences of marginalized and exploited people in our communities, and we need ways to discuss and organize around the connections between various oppressions and capitalism. As anti-oppression activists, we need to develop a critical discourse that connects the socio-historical contexts of capitalism and class to race, gender, sexuality and ability.

To the annoyance of some leftists who argue that capitalism and class form the fundamental basis of all oppression, anti-oppression organizing seeks to understand the connections between racism, sexism, heterosexism, colonialism and class. Anti-oppression politics have the potential to provide a useful antidote to reductionist perspectives which leave out the fundamental roles of patriarchy and racism in determining both capitalism and class relations.

But is this happening? Or are anti-oppression activists repeating the same mistakes made by proponents of identity politics in the 1960s and 1970s, and being co-opted by the claimed multiculturalism of the Canadian state? Do anti-oppression politics expand the analysis of radical organizing, or are they merely "reinventing the wheel" by

addressing individual behaviors? Can anti-oppression politics provide a model for a multi-faceted analysis that addresses oppression and class exploitation as distinct but nevertheless intimately interrelated social relationships?

The dynamics of anti-oppression politics often reinforce notions of oppression that we should be trying to debunk. People of colour, for example, are often deemed anti-oppression "experts," and are expected to do anti-oppression work for primarily white organizations. What are systemic issues then become problems stemming from individual behaviour, which can lead to the de-politicization or political paralysis of activist groups. As the radical roots of anti-oppression in feminist, anti-racist and queer movements become co-opted, the education model developed by anti-oppression activists is being taken up by mainstream, "multiculturalist" and liberal discourses.

The following is a roundtable discussion based upon interviews with three activists who have engaged with anti-oppression politics in the context of radical political organizing. These interviews address the relevance, influence and problems of anti-oppression politics for these activists. We encourage feedback and further discussion on the ideas expressed here. If you would like to write us with your own observations on these questions, or contribute an article for the next issue of our journal, please get in touch with us.

UTA: Please introduce yourselves.

Kirat Kaur: I am a young, able migrant woman of South Asian descent. I am currently an organizer with the Bus Riders Union and a board member of the South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD).

Junie Désil: I am a Haitian-Canadian feminist community organizer and writer. I was born in Montréal, but I now live and work in Vancouver, where I provide training in the area of facilitation (using an anti-oppressive framework), community development, as well as working at the Vancouver Status of Women, a women's centre in East Vancouver.

Gary Kinsman: I got involved in the revolutionary left in the early 1970s and, shortly after, came out as a gay man and got involved in queer organizing.¹ I come from a white middle class background and I am now a university professor. I have been involved in the Sudbury Coalition Against Poverty and Autonomy and Solidarity.

UTA: What has been your experience with anti-oppression politics?

Kirat: My experiences with anti-oppression politics have been varied, and, initially, led me to find it a problematic discourse. I was first introduced to this kind of politics in my training for a local rape crisis line's volunteer peer support work. The training was done in an anti-oppression framework, with the second half of it broken up into workshops that dealt with each individual oppression. In particular, I remember the workshop on 'class oppression' to be not much more than making sure people were not engaged in 'poor bashing' and discussions about how we should not 'discriminate against poor people'. At this time in my political development, my class analysis was weak, and so I accepted that definition of 'class oppression' as a starting point from which my understanding of class developed (although my class analysis did not grow from within that particular organization). Moreover, even then, I found that particular brand of anti-oppression politics to be very much focused on inter-personal, individual change, with no attention paid to systemic issues and to fighting collectively for systemic change.

Since then, through my involvement with revolutionary grassroots organizations, I have come to realize that most anti-capitalist organizing does not integrate a strong analysis of other forms of oppression such as race and gender oppression. Through my organizing with the Bus Riders Union, I have come to see that a strong anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-oppression framework is integral to the success of social justice movements.

Junie: I have been involved in anti-oppression politics for some time, though in the past 4 or 5 years, I would say I have really come into my own. Having said that, my work and anti-oppression politics continually evolve, and will always be a "work in progress." I first started as a young Black woman dedicated to anti-racism at the University of British Columbia. In my involvement with various student groups, I started to become self-aware and politically involved. Such spaces were critical for me as they validated my existence and my experiences as a racialized woman, but sometimes these spaces only validated one or two experiences at a time. I started to find "single issue" politics and organizing problematic; they only addressed one issue or discrimination at a time and did not necessarily take into account the multiplicity of locations myself and others around me experienced.

Somehow, quite by accident really, I started to facilitate "diversity and inclusion" workshops, which let's be honest, tend to focus on "celebrating" difference, having (white) people feel good, and providing no actual space for participants to reflect on or acknowledge their privilege, or "see" the systemic discrimination and oppression marginalized groups experience. I started going through the pain of giving such workshops, and I had to start reconfiguring what such workshops should look like.

Two experiences stand out that really solidified my resolve to change my approach. The first involved my being contracted to do a three workshop series for youth at a youth resource centre. The youth, by outsider and social service standards, would be deemed "at-risk." I was asked to do anti-oppression workshops, and to particularly talk about homophobia, white privilege, etc. The youth were primarily First Nations between the ages of 13-24, and there were a few white youth as well. The sessions were hard and intense given the nature of the workshops, the wide range of ages, the life experiences and status these youth occupied. Halfway through the second session, one fairly young attendee interrupted the workshop and said, "why do we have to learn about racism when they're the ones who have problems with us?" I remember being floored, because, to a large extent, he was right; we had forgotten that this was an anti-oppression workshop that was supposed to examine all forms of inequality. But I was also floored because we were talking about different kinds of oppression (not just racism), and how they interconnect. For many of the youth, the workshop was about anti-racism and nothing else. I had to ask myself; "what was I (not) doing for this understanding to sink in (or not)?"

The second experience, which was an ongoing struggle, was my paid work, where I was working with a new regional organization that focused on how youth were affected by violence, using photojournalism as a medium. Part of my work was to do leadership-training workshops for youth. At the end of the training, youth were supposed to be able to go out to schools and into the community in order to talk about their experiences with violence. There were a number of problems with the model, one being that speaking from experience is fine, but without context it risks being misunderstood. For example, many of the youth experienced violence as a result of their sexual orientation (whether perceived as queer by their peers or consciously out). Others experienced violence as a result of their ethnicity and race. Thus talking about violence devoid of such contexts was problematic. I prepared a

12-week curriculum, and asked guest speakers from Women Against Violence Against Women, women's centres and other community groups to come in while I covered the "presentation" basics. My efforts to contextualize the violence that some of the youth experienced as a systemic problem, as an institutional problem rather than an individual experience, were repeatedly thwarted. Those experiences made me realize that I needed to shift my politics or at the very least my framework. That realization and the fact that mentors and other like-minded activists in my entourage could show me an alternative really helped focus my anti-oppression work.

Gary: My first grappling with anti-oppression politics in the context of anti-capitalism and the left took place around queer struggles and queer liberation as we struggled to have lesbian/gay liberation integrated into the politics of the Revolutionary Marxist Group, and later, the Revolutionary Workers League in the 1970s. There were years of battle against the notion in much of the left that gay/lesbian liberation was a 'marginal' or 'peripheral' issue compared to the 'centrality' of a narrow political economy notion of class and class struggle.

In the context of this struggle, I also became profoundly affected by feminism and later by anti-racist movements. When it became clear to me that the Leninist left was not going to be able to learn in any profound way from feminism and the queer movements I left it in 1980. For a period of time (and still), I was very influenced by Sheila Rowbotham's socialist feminist critique of Leninism developed in the book *Beyond the Fragments*. One of the main points developed in this book was the inability of the Leninist left to be transformed by feminism and other movements coming out of experiences of oppression, and how feminism could provide at least part of the basis for a new left that could move beyond the fragments.

For the next sixteen years I was a left activist in the gay liberation and AIDS activist movements with a little bit of anti-war organizing at the time of the first Gulf War. I was involved for a number of years in *Rites* magazine, which attempted to develop a more radical queer politic by making links between different forms of oppression, as well as between oppression and class. I also worked with Gay Liberation Against the Right Everywhere (GLARE). I was involved in the resistance to the police raids on gay men's bath houses in the early 1980s in Toronto, and later in AIDS ACTION NOW! I learned a lot from my involvement in these struggles and movements.

In the mid-1990s, in the context of the Mike Harris neo-liberal 'common-sense revolution,' I once again joined a radical left organization. This time it was the New Socialist Group, which I thought held out some promise for developing a broader class struggle politics that could include feminism, queer liberation, and anti-racism. In the context of this group I again tried to help facilitate learning from feminist and queer struggles with some success. At the same time, this project was limited by the fact that a lot of feminist and queer struggles that were at one point extremely radical had been transformed into more moderate movements. In relation to queer organizing, this had to do with a shift in the class composition of queer movements with a new professional-managerial queer strata gaining hegemony. A critical class analysis was now necessary to grasp what was going on in queer movements and community formation. The more recent focus on same-sex marriage as the end-game of our struggle has made the moderate direction of the mainstream queer groups very clear. For me it is almost impossible to be a queer activist anymore given the connections that need to be made with class and other social struggles if these struggles are to be made radical again – radical as in getting to the root of the problem.

UTA: What, in your opinion, has been the greatest influence of anti-oppression work in anti-capitalist movements? How has it contributed to the consciousness of anti-capitalist activists?

Kirat: I think that to some extent, anti-oppression work is really the articulation of long-standing criticisms of anti-capitalist movements in the First World (i.e. that their class analysis ignores other forms of oppression, that their leadership is white male-dominated, and that this is precisely what has shaped the inability of anti-capitalist movements to organize the different sectors of the working class). Like it or not, class is lived through race, gender and other forms of oppression, and no, these will not magically disappear 'after the revolution.' In fact, we have seen historical examples of how a revolution has not, in fact, automatically eliminated gender and race oppression in places like Nicaragua and Cuba. Also, while it is true that race is often used to divide the working class, simply ignoring these racial divisions that already exist will not make them go away. Anti-racism is not the same as colour-blindness. I think it is about time that anti-capitalist movements start to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the intersections of the different oppressions, and

how we must fight against all the forces of oppression together in the fight for a more socially just world.

Junie: One of the greatest influences that anti-oppression politics has had on the anti-capitalist movement is the understanding that power and privilege cannot go unexamined in the fight against capitalism. Additionally, we must recognize that capitalism affects different groups differently, that different groups have been exploited in different ways in order to advance capitalism, and that most importantly, it is no mere accident that these groups bear the brunt of capitalism. Despite that influence, I still find that individuals and groups who have difficulty understanding their power and privilege are unable to share power, and feel the need to speak for marginalized groups and often dominate anti-capitalist groups and movements. There seems to be a basic inability to understand that anti-oppression politics is a framework that informs how one organizes, how one shares material and information, how one participates, how one invites other groups to participate.

Good anti-oppressive feminist politics need to form the foundation. For example, a number of anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist groups exist in Vancouver. Organizing, educating, protesting and rallying are some of the activities these groups engage in. Yet many groups are left out as a result of the lack of a nuanced anti-oppression understanding and framework. Thus protests and/or rallies are planned quickly with little consultation, a lack of representation of people, issues and interests, a lack of acknowledgement of the fact that we are organizing on unceded indigenous territory, a lack of planning for accessibility, for interpretation, for making the spaces safe/accessible for children, etc. If none of these considerations take place at the basic level of coming together, of planning and educating, how then can we consider our politics to be anti-oppressive? While many of these groups are making changes, the changes are slow. However long these changes take, anti-oppression frameworks and politics can strengthen the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movement.

Gary: While I have learned a lot from feminist and anti-racist movements, I have also become committed to a politics of responsibility in relation to fighting oppression. This is far more than a politics of solidarity based on learning to support other social struggles and learning from these struggles. We need to recognize our own social locations and our implications in social relations of oppression and to begin to challenge white and male privilege. As someone who

identifies as male and white, this has been especially important in trying to develop a politics of responsibility in challenging patriarchal and white hegemonic relations from within my own social location. In addressing my own implication within, and responsibility for, white hegemony, the following quote from Himani Bannerji's *Thinking Through* (in which she refers to white academics she has worked with), has served as a useful starting point;

“And sitting there, hearing claims about sharing “experience,” having empathy, a nausea rose in me. Why do they, I thought, only talk about racism, as understanding us, doing good to “us”? Why don't they move from the experience of sharing our pain, to narrating the experience of afflicting it on us? Why do they not question their own cultures, childhoods, upbringings, and ask how they could live so “naturally” in this “white” environment, never noticing that fact until we brought it home to them?”

For me a politics of responsibility is crucial to developing anti-oppression politics. Those of us who participate in producing relations of oppression need to challenge them from our locations to open up more space for those who directly experience oppression. We don't have to wait to be asked to act against oppression, we can take our own initiatives and begin to undo oppression from our places within it.

UTA: How do you feel about anti-oppression politics and education now being used by hierarchical and capitalist institutions such as union bureaucracies and the state? What are some of the contradictions and problems you have found with anti-oppression politics?

Kirat: It has been easy to depoliticize and de-radicalize anti-oppression in capitalist institutions, which is of course their aim, whether conscious or unconscious. It would not really be in the interests of the state or capital if people were to really start understanding and acting upon their analysis of oppression, would it?

So a lot of the language and ideas have been co-opted, stuck in the realm of ‘identity politics’ and rendered useless. However, I think there is still room to see that as a starting point in people's political development, although there is so much out there to keep people stuck in that world-view and not develop their understanding further.

As I mentioned earlier, one problem is that it is easy to get stuck in the interpersonal, and lose sight of the systemic. While both aspects of oppression are important, we need to find ways to be constantly evaluating our personal and interpersonal relationships to each oppression, in the context of systemic forces, in order to unite in collective struggle.

Another problem that I find with anti-oppression politics is that there is a tendency to diffuse each kind of oppression as happening on an equal footing. I do not believe this to be true; I believe that class is the central contradiction in the world today. This is not to say that other forms of oppression do not act on people's lives independently. For example, Maher Arar's status as a middle class person did not stop his deportation from Canada to detention and torture in Syria. My point though, is that an anti-oppression framework can fall into being too simplistic, kind of like a checklist, where the more kinds of oppressions you fall into, the more oppressed you are, when really, all other kinds of oppression are experienced through class. For instance, an upper class disabled person will have far more access to resources and far less experiences of marginalization and of struggle than a non-status migrant from the Third World who can't even receive disability benefits. Also, being classified as a member of more than one oppressed group does not just have an additive effect, but implies entirely different conceptions of people's lived realities.

My best experiences with anti-oppression have been organizing with the Bus Riders Union. The BRU's strategy involves building an anti-racist and anti-sexist organization of the multi-racial, mixed-gender working class. We fight to win concrete gains for transit dependent people, the majority of whom are women, people of colour, and Aboriginal people, while building a long-term movement for social justice. We recognize that it is precisely those who are the most marginalized who have the most to gain from fighting for a more just world. Thus, the BRU prioritizes the education, training and leadership of working class women of colour and Aboriginal women, and looks to Third World movements for inspiration and guidance. My worst experiences of anti-oppression have been when the framework has fallen into all the traps I have talked about earlier and become depoliticized, tokenistic and destructive.

Junie: Anti-oppression politics, however empowering and liberatory, does have its drawbacks. It's now the new buzzword in the social activist/education scene, and is quickly being co opted and

absorbed into mainstream spaces. In my paid work, I receive phone calls from organizations, unions, school boards, and university student groups asking for anti-oppression workshops. Others call wanting to find out what an anti-oppression framework would look like and how it can be implemented, as if doing so will only take a phone call, or the workshop time requested. On the one hand, the recognition that such work and education is important, that anti-oppression politics are integral, makes one feel excited at the idea that change is happening. On the other hand, a number of problems arise both in terms of understanding anti-oppression politics and how we do our work.

First, anti-oppression education is a lifelong commitment. No amount of workshops will make one an expert. Second, the nature of anti-oppression begs one to re examine one's power relations, one's privilege(s) in relation to other groups, to consider how our multiple locations may shift and change depending on the spaces we occupy. Sherene Razack in *Looking White People in the Eye*, argues that a politics of inclusivity, of adding up oppressions, so to speak, is simply not enough. Rather, a politics of accountability needs to occur, where we not only look at how we are differently affected, but also how we are complicit in the subordination of others. Because anti-oppression education is not comfortable and is challenging (as it should be), it does not follow the script of "let's all feel good, and celebrate our differences, our foods and dances." Thirdly, the very same people affected by these dominant systems of oppression are the same ones facilitating or doing anti-oppression education work. The emotional toll, the price we pay is extremely high. We put ourselves, our bodies, on display as we stand in spaces where participants may not reflect our experiences, where often we prove, yet again, that oppression does and continues to exist.

This brings us to the fourth problem with anti-oppression work; that we need to regroup and figure out what exactly anti-oppression work is about. Too often the anti-oppression education that is taking place becomes a space where participants from dominant groups become the centre of attention and focus, and the centre of education. This inevitably leads to the question of who should be doing the educating. I would invite readers to ask instead, "when and where are appropriate spaces to do anti-oppression work?" Ask yourselves and others, "how can I/we take on the work? How can I be an ally?" Fifth, as anti-oppression educators, we need to be connecting with our allies, and allies need to be stepping up to the plate to educate those privileged

communities. While there is the understanding by some that it is not up to those that come from marginalized spaces to teach privileged “dominant cultured” individuals or groups, at the end of the day, many of us are in fact educating these privileged groups. There is also the concern that many of those individuals doing ally work using an anti-oppressive framework are not in fact doing so. Instead, individuals facilitating these workshops leave their privilege unexamined. Sixth, anti-oppression politics need to get out of academia. Many of us, (myself included) come in with a set of language and vocabulary that not only reifies the activist/academia divide, but also ignores the work that many have been doing in academic spaces.

Lastly, a conversation needs to occur between the anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and anti-oppression movements. Pitting one against the other is not useful, but, given the focus of these three movements, the head butting is understandable. Each one needs the other, but I see the anti-oppression movement from a feminist perspective as integral to any organizing and education work. Perhaps it is necessary to have these three spaces to talk about the systemic injustices that are experienced by marginalized people and communities. If that is the case, each of these spaces needs to become much more nuanced in their approach to organizing and educating. The anti-oppression movement seems to be headed in that direction, but perhaps needs to be much more explicit when it comes to anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist education; I would argue that it is not entirely lacking that analysis. Each of these spaces needs to understand that the systems of power rely on each other to maintain themselves. Capitalism cannot work without imperialism; they go hand in hand. Capitalism and imperialism cannot work without the hegemonic, racist, sexist, ableist and heteronormative spaces that define our world.

Gary: While there have been major insights in anti-oppression politics as they have been developed there are also major contradictions and limitations. Each form of oppression has its own specific social character – its own autonomy so to speak – and there is a danger of flattening out the differences in the social organization of the various forms of oppression in developing a common anti-oppression politics. Sexism is not racism and is not heterosexism, even though they are made in and through each other and are connected to class relations in a broad sense. Each specific social form of oppression requires its own autonomous movement and struggle, while at the same time we have to see how forms of oppression and class exploitation mutually

construct each other. It has been understandable that in response to the narrow “class first” politics of much of the left, activists rooted in movements against oppression have developed a distinct politics separate from class and anti-capitalist politics. At the same time, this also opens up space for the deployment of new strategies of regulation and management of movements and communities of the oppressed including formal legal equality (which is not the same as substantive social equality), multiculturalism, strategies for producing layers of a middle class elite that can speak for and be the ‘legitimate’ representatives for various communities, and various strategies of integration into the existing order of things (same-sex marriage as the end-game of our struggle being one of these strategies).

Often this revolves around a politics of inclusion and representation which poses the struggle as one of representation within and integration into existing forms of social organization rather than a radical transformation of existing social relations. These strategies of regulation construct a rigid separation between social identity and community and a radical critique of capitalism, thus denying the social and historical connections between community formation and class relations. This helps to create the space for the emergence of middle class elites in various communities and movements to rise to the top and shift politics in a more pro-capitalist direction. We have to reject this separation, and discover instead how to build a broader notion of anti-capitalist and working class politics that includes anti-oppression struggles at its core. Anti-capitalist politics cannot currently be developed without addressing its links to the various struggles against oppression.

In my view, this is the only way that anti-capitalist politics can be made actual as a revolutionary praxis. Anti-capitalist politics needs anti-oppression politics and radical anti-oppression politics needs a broader anti-capitalist perspective.

While anti-racism and feminism have been far more successful than queer politics as forms of radical anti-oppression, they (along with anti-disability and anti-ageist forms of organizing) are all crucial to the development a new anti-capitalist politics that addresses oppression as central to class politics. Most recently, I have found currents within autonomist Marxism (see my article “Learning from Autonomist Marxism” in this issue of *Upping the Anti*), that develop a broader notion of the working class and anti-capitalism that includes the struggles of housewives, students, and peasants. Broadening

notions of working class struggle is very useful in bringing together anti-oppression and anti-capitalist politics. Autonomist Marxism has also grasped the need for the autonomous struggles of working class women against patriarchy, people of colour against white supremacy, and queers against heterosexism. While not resolving the problems we face, autonomist Marxism can provide us with tools that are key in the development of an anti-oppression politics that is at the same time anti-capitalist. Until we have broadened our understanding of anti-capitalist politics and working class struggle, it is vital to stubbornly hold onto anti-oppression politics (despite their imperfections), and to prevent them from being subordinated to a narrow notion of anti-capitalism. At the same time, on the level of forms of organizing and tactics, some of the acquisitions of the global justice movement (including direct action politics, affinity groups, spokescouncils, etc.), can also help us create the basis for a radical anti-capitalist anti-oppression politics. ★

NOTES:

¹ See Gary's interview with Deborah Brock for Left History called "Workers of the World Caress" on organizing around queer questions in the revolutionary left in the 1970s at www.yorku.ca/lefthist/online/brock_kinsman.html.

A Roundtable on Anti-Capitalism and Organization

Edited by Aidan Conway

That we have recently seen an important radicalization can be registered in the rising appeal and relative rejuvenation of anti-capitalist politics and perspectives, particularly in the anti-globalization and anti-war movements. While there has been a notable downturn in the last couple of years, associated with both the "war on terrorism" (at home and abroad) and the contradictions of these movements themselves, the fate of this anti-capitalist radicalization is not a foregone conclusion. Many people would agree that whether or not the movements extend their reach and deepen their roots will depend in part on their ability to *organize*. But how?

For much of the twentieth century, the most common and influential (though never monolithic), answer to this question was one or another version of the vanguard party. The virtue of Leninism, and the basis for its widespread appeal to revolutionaries around the world, was that it provided a relatively coherent (if seriously flawed) set of answers to the fundamental questions of how to organize for revolutionary social change. It addressed the role of organization, the problem of (uneven) political consciousness, the nature of leadership and democracy, and the basic tasks of revolutionary movements.

For a variety of reasons, notably the degeneration and eclipse of state socialism and the shortcomings of the surviving sectarian left, many in the current generation of anti-capitalists seem to have concluded that "the party's over" and have begun to search for alternative forms of organization and politics. From the renewal of anarchist and council-communist ideas, to experimentation with new federative and de-centralized forms in social movements, anti-capitalists have been attempting to overcome the dangers of vanguardism (elitism, authoritarianism, substitutionalism) while trying to provide answers to the questions and problems posed by organizing for radical social change.

For some, revolutionary parties or cadre organizations are done for, and a "movement of movements" coordinated (but not led or directed) by activist networks should take their place. Others maintain that revolutionary organizing on a principled political and even

programmatic basis, whatever its concrete form, is essential in order to sustain and go beyond resistance, deepen analysis, and synthesize experiences and insights into shared political strategies and visions for transformative social change.

Organizational questions are always political questions. As such, they should reflect our understanding of what we are fighting for and how we propose to do it. There is a tendency to idealize particular organizational forms or “models” without asking tough questions about their political basis. While there is little agreement about these questions, the way forward lies in principled discussion, debate, and experimentation, not in uncritically repeating formulas and phrases, whether of dogmatic Leninist “party-building” or of trendy anti-authoritarian “movement-ism.”

In the spirit of providing a forum for these important debates and discussions, we have asked several people from different traditions and perspectives to suggest ways in which some of these questions can be grappled with. It is our hope that we can provide an ongoing space for the kind of debate that can help to clarify what is at stake and give form to different options for moving forward.



Robbie Mahood is a long-time socialist and member of Socialist Action. He works as a family doctor and lives in Montreal. This interview was conducted in Montreal in February 2005.

UTA: Maybe you could start by outlining your thoughts on what you see as the need for and nature of revolutionary organizations? How should they participate in and relate to broader movements? What are some of the tensions involved in this?

Robbie Mahood: The basic rationale for a revolutionary organization is to gather together people who see the need and possibility for fundamental social transformation and to concentrate their energies and deliberations in an organization that tries to intervene in larger struggles in a disciplined fashion. Beyond this general purpose, a revolutionary organization has to go beyond just being a propaganda group and actively participate in struggles, whatever their dimension, including providing practical leadership

to move these struggles forward. All of this requires some form of disciplined, and to a certain extent, centralized organization.

The traditional accusation of the non-Leninist left would be that revolutionary organizations come into movements for the sole purpose of recruitment and don't take responsibility for the agenda of the movement. Of course, this kind of parasitic relationship is always possible, the more so if a revolutionary organization limits itself to a purely propagandistic role. But I believe that on the whole it is false to pose the problem in this manner. It is never possible to insulate social movements from politics, just as it's impossible to insulate any aspect of life and society from politics. It's really just a question of how responsibly that's done and how transparent the relationship is. In any case, movements of consequence quickly take on a mass dynamic of their own which is generally impervious to conscious or unconscious manipulation by small groups.

Of course it is possible for organizations that are disciplined and centralized to play an important role in social movements out of proportion to their numbers and for this to have a negative impact. Movements may come to rely excessively on the energies and ideas of a particular organization, such that the movement either is, or is regarded as, a creature of that particular political group or party. Where such a relationship between party and movement prevails, the movement is inevitably weakened. I think it's incumbent upon any Leninist or other revolutionary organization to avoid the error of substitutionism, and to try to broaden the movement to the greatest extent possible. Admittedly, this error can be easier to point out than to avoid in practice.

More serious in my view is when a socialist organization adheres to certain misguided political conceptions or has an unrealistic, or conversely overly pessimistic, view of what it is possible to achieve and then is able to impose its perspective on a broader movement. Organizations, Leninist or otherwise, are certainly not immune from political errors. But the best way of correcting mistaken conceptions is surely not to argue that our organizations should be looser and less disciplined. Organizations with a high level of internal debate and commitment arguably have a greater capacity to correct political errors, provided they are not defined by counterproductive doctrinal fetishes or leadership cults and have a tradition of lively internal debate. If this is not the case, then open debate between organizations of the

left can sometimes lead to a better political orientation for broader forces.

I don't think there is a final answer or formula for how organized revolutionaries should relate to mass movements. In any case, Leninist groups are no more prone to errors than ideologically looser organizations. Attempts to steer movements towards a more advanced consciousness or demands are quite common impulses and may be quite counterproductive. For example, the efforts of radical or socialist feminists to push the broader women's movement further to the left may end up narrowing the base of unity in action and weakening the movement's impact. Another example would be trying to push the anti-war movement to take up an explicitly anti-imperialist stance rather than focus on unitary demands to bring in forces who don't share this perspective.

UTA: On the other hand, what some people would say is that if you refuse to try to build movements in a more radical direction you may end up being opportunistic and “tailing” the movements. Do you see that as a danger?

RM: Sure, you could end up tailing it. That is, not pushing the movement to win its agenda in a combative way and in a way that advances the struggle. I think groups can be culpable on two sides: on the one hand, of imposing a “too-advanced” or narrow sectarian agenda on a mass movement or potential mass movement, and on the other of not taking any responsibility at all for leading that movement and collapsing their politics into a more conservative layer of the movement. In either case, the revolutionary group will try to actively recruit.

It seems to me that every organization wants to win people to its overall perspectives and recruit new members. And many people, especially the young or those new to activism, are looking for radical political solutions. Joining a political party is far from a bad thing even if we have this image that the new recruit to a revolutionary organization is on the fast track to becoming a political zombie and will be lost to the broader movement. This is not really the case. To be sure, small group loyalties can be divisive. But every revolutionary group or aspiring party has to deal with the reality of the larger movements and struggles in which it intervenes. The organization that recruits in an opportunistic fashion will quickly run up against the limitations of this short-sighted approach. Ultimately, groups will be judged by

whether they play an effective role in advancing the overall struggle and the maturity of their political judgement.

The fragmentation of the revolutionary left definitely creates problems. Any movement which gains momentum will inevitably be descended upon by competing groups of the left vying for an audience. I tend to think this is a price we pay for the crisis in leadership of the workers movement in which no credible alternative to reformism has emerged and the way forward is open to dispute.

I think it's compounded in North America as compared to Europe because of the lower level of politicization here. People are not used to interventions from people who are partisan, who have an organizational affiliation and therefore there is a tendency to want to preserve and insulate movements from politics in that sense, from the influence of political organizations, which I think ultimately won't work. Sometimes it masks an implicit anti-communist agenda: “We don't want the influence of certain organizations but other organizations are okay, or we want to keep the movement disorganized or depoliticized because we ourselves have a political agenda which is reformist.”

As long as a group of revolutionaries, in Marx's relatively well known dictum, doesn't have interests apart from or separate from those of the working class as a whole, and takes that seriously as a modus operandi, it seems to me that at least some of those tensions can be dealt with. They have to be acknowledged and discussed in revolutionary organizations, and in a movement as a whole to the extent that they become an issue.

UTA: Returning for a moment to the issue of internal structure and organization in revolutionary groups; there is a pretty common perception, sometimes a caricature, of Leninism and democratic centralism that survives in part because of the real practice of many of these groups, currently and historically. What thoughts do you have on this dynamic?

RM: The fact that revolutionary groups are very small and isolated tends to aggravate certain dynamics that might not otherwise be so important. For instance, there are splits around issues that are not really issues of principle but that often relate to personalities, local peculiarities or other social factors. I think this is a product of the weakness of these groups, which tends to fuel small group dynamics which are notoriously unhealthy.

I'm in favor of the right of tendencies, and think that organizations have to make room for minority perspectives and to offer minorities the opportunity to win a majority of the organization to their perspective. At the same time the rule of majority has to be respected. A majority line has to be implemented in practice and then subjected to criticism and correction if need be.

These issues are going to be with us no matter what kind of political organization arises, whether it's the linear growth of a small Leninist group or whether it's a mass party. I think that any organization is going to have to wrestle with a tension between centralized decision-making and loyalty to the central line of a majority leadership, and the rights of minorities. But with the rights of minority comes a certain responsibility to not part company on the basis of unprincipled positions, but on principled historical divides.

What we're talking about is the concept of a combat party (of which Lenin was the foremost exponent), a party that acts as a repository for the historical lessons, memory if you will, of the working class movement, and one that also debates its ongoing intervention in a structured and disciplined fashion. It holds its leadership accountable and it also allows the leadership to function. I think those are things that are not necessarily unique to Leninism but can be applied no matter what the organizational form.

UTA: This relates in part to the question of leadership, which is a controversial one for many in today's radical movements which tend to be suspicious of formal leadership and any indirect forms of democracy. What do you think about this?

RM: I was involved in the 1960's New Left in Canada. This was a radical current that, despite its healthy rejection of the Stalinist monolithism of much of the old left, tended to conflate leadership with elitism. Unfortunately, in denying the importance or even the existence of leaders, the New Left tended to foster informal and even manipulative leaderships which were not accountable to the rank and file of the movement.

There is no magic to creating a vibrant internal democracy in an organization. It is always a work in progress and it requires the continual education of the members through debate and discussion. On the other hand, an organization cannot be just a debating club. Its purpose is to concentrate the efforts of its members towards concrete political tasks. For a revolutionary organization to be effective

requires among other things a degree of professionalism and even an apparatus appropriate to the size of the organization and the scope of its activities.

Revolutionary organizations have to wrestle with how they develop leadership, particularly in relationship to people who have not traditionally been welcomed into leadership positions, for example, women, workers or persons from marginalized or oppressed groups. There are ways in which an organization can consciously promote leaders from the front lines of struggles against oppression or working class struggle, and it's incumbent on our organizations to do that. Its also incumbent on organizations to establish acceptable norms in terms of inter-personal conduct even if we recognize that its not possible to overcome all the effects of class society on the individual personality.

The counter argument to all of this is that we don't need any kind of disciplined organization, which is a very 'spontaneist' view of how capitalism could be overcome and transformed.

UTA: What do you see as the main shortcomings of these kinds of 'spontaneist' approaches? What is this perspective not taking seriously?

RM: Well at one level it doesn't take seriously the question of politics, in the sense of the question of state power and the need to replace the capitalist state with a different kind of state. In some cases it even dismisses that historical question and says we don't need to take power. So you have a kind of autonomist tradition, which has enjoyed a certain amount of prominence in the last decade, for example based on the Zapatista movement, that basically says that capitalist society can be transformed by incremental little islands of resistance and micro-mobilization of the community, so that we don't need to pose the overall taking of power.

By absenting ourselves from the question of power and the revolutionary transformation of the state we leave the field open to reformism and also expose any enclaves of alternative class power to the repressive forces of the capitalist state. This is where the spontaneist vision and also anarchism fall far short of the mark in my view.

UTA: How about this tension between revolutionary organization and movement building? Where is the line between trying to take initiative and exercise leadership within a movement and substituting yourself for the movement?

RM: It's hard to talk about this in a schematic fashion, so it's more useful to examine specific instances in a given time and place. We might point to the early years of the Canadian Communist Party, for example, which is the subject of the Ian Angus's study *Canadian Bolsheviks*. During the 1920's, Canadian communists were instrumental in launching a Canadian Labour Party which succeeded for a time in bringing in forces beyond those of the CP. It seems that this initiative was not just a classic front group or appendage of the revolutionary organization and that the early CP in Canada knew how to reach out to broader numbers of activists who were not revolutionaries and engage them in common political projects which moved the working class movement forward. I think we have to accept that political organizations have a place in movements or larger formations and indeed may be instrumental to their initiation and development.

UTA: **Do you see that example as contrasting to what is going on today among Leninist groups in terms of making it a priority to engage in building those kinds of broader structures and capacities, instead of a more narrow focus on linear "party building"?**

RM: Yes, in my opinion any Leninist organization worth its salt will try to stimulate mobilization and organization of broad masses around specific campaigns or political projects. Groups that are strictly propaganda groups can be characterized, I suppose, as subscribing to a linear model of growth of their organization. But there are lots of examples of groups that have engaged in mass work and also tried to recruit from these initiatives. Granted, recently, there have been some interesting attempts to break out of this linear model of "party building" and to adopt a model of 'regroupment'. I'm thinking of Respect in the UK, the Scottish Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliance in Australia. These developments reflect the advanced crisis in the traditional reformist leaderships of the working class movement by which I include both Social Democracy which is more and more indistinguishable from social Liberalism and also the Stalinist parties which were thrown into disarray by the fall of the USSR.

The difficulty of launching new mass parties or potential mass working-class parties does not stem only or even principally from the sectarian orientation of small groupuscules, whether self-identified as Leninist or not, but more importantly from the domination of working-class politics by overtly reformist forces. Breaking the mass of workers from the grip of these pro-capitalist leaderships is crucial to

the re-launching of mass revolutionary parties at least in the advanced capitalist states (in some cases, notably the USA, there has never been a political break even towards working class reformist politics). The mass of workers breaks very reluctantly and in times of crisis with these leaderships, no matter how compromised they are, towards a more radical and longer-term perspective. So I think it's complex, and it's not like you can do everything. You have to play with the cards that history has dealt you and I think the hold of reformism on politically conscious workers is still quite strong

You can see this reflected in English-speaking Canada where previous waves of working class radicalization led to a mass party of the social democratic type but one which was unable to win more than a minority position within the working class as a whole. It's not impossible to bypass a weak and degenerate New Democratic Party (NDP) but not without a significant rise in class struggles and the testing out of political alternatives in real life. In North America the working class movement is on the defensive and hardly able to combat the neoliberal offensive anywhere. So I think that the weakness of the NDP to some extent circumscribes the possibilities for launching viable alternatives to the left of the NDP in English Canada. This can't hold forever, of course, but I think it continues to be a limiting factor on the possibilities for organizational regroupment or the capacity for building revolutionary currents as such.

In Québec it's a bit of a different question because of the national question, which has meant the domination of the national movement by a bourgeois nationalist party, the Parti Québécois, and the historical absence of any significant social democratic, or for that matter Stalinist, current within the working class. The tasks are necessarily posed somewhat differently in Québec, but speaking of English Canada, I think that the NDP is a fact of life and it needs to be taken seriously by revolutionaries. Do we see the possibilities of regrouping currents to the left of the NDP? Perhaps, but I'm not greatly impressed with the organizational results of such regroupment perspectives over the last 25 years.

It's been a long time now that a large segment of the independent left in Canada, which is disinclined to intervene in the NDP, has also been hesitant about of throwing its lot in with one or another of the Leninist or other revolutionary tendencies. The positive balance sheet of the efforts of the centrist left is a very miniscule one to date. I don't rule it out but I'm yet to be impressed with those possibilities. You can

also pose the possibility of regrouping the small revolutionary groups on the left, but for a variety of reasons it hasn't taken place. We don't have the same regroupment projects off and running that you see in Britain or Australia.

UTA: In conclusion, let's pick up some of the things we've discussed with respect to the anti-war movement. Several political currents have argued that the thing to do is push the movement as a whole to identify imperialism as what we are talking about. A similar question arises with respect to "anti-capitalism" in the anti-globalization movement. What do you think about this?

RM: There are some lessons for me in the anti-war movement of the sixties. The movement against the Vietnam war also produced a strong anti-imperialist discourse and groups who wanted to transform the anti-war movement into an anti-imperialist front. Carrying red flags and calling for victory to the NLF was attractive to thousands of radicalizing youth around the globe, myself included. Some of the Leninist groups of the day, notably the American Socialist Workers Party, argued against this perspective in favour of more concrete demands such as "US Out" around which the greatest unity could be built and which, if won, would mean a significant defeat for imperialism. I think the SWP had the best of that argument.

How does that translate into the anti-war movement of today? Well, I think we should strive for the greatest possible unity that principled anti-imperialism will allow. That doesn't mean insisting that an anti-imperialist analysis is a pre-condition for joining the movement. The focus should be on demands for immediate and complete withdrawal and against Canadian complicity. There is nothing wrong with raising anti-imperialist positions at marches or in the educational activities of the anti-war movement. But as to the central mobilizing demands, these have to be kept concrete, principled and unifying.

Having said that, the anti-war movement needs to have its own internal discussion as well as promote public debate and analysis on the concrete history of imperialism in the Middle East as well as specific developments in the war without compromising unity with other groups that are not necessarily anti-capitalist but are opposed to the war and want to disengage imperialist forces or oppose Canadian complicity.

I think the question with the anti-war movement, the anti-globalization movement and with movements generally is: At what

point do they have a perspective about how to engage other political forces in their work? To work out such a perspective in relation to the trade union movement or the women's movement is very important because otherwise you're adrift without a clear class perspective, and that can't go on forever. It seems to me that movements which are going to generalize their influence in a society have to at some point begin to engage with these fundamental social and institutional forces despite the many obstacles.

But again I think revolutionary organizations can provide a certain perspective for doing that, which is a valuable contribution they can make to the building of the anti-war movement, the anti-globalization movement as well as other movements. ★

Indu Viasbistink is an activist with experience in revolutionary organizing and a variety of anti-capitalist movements on the West Coast. She currently lives in Montreal and is completing a Master's degree in History at Concordia university. This interview was conducted in Montreal in February 2005.

UTA: In general terms, how do you understand to be the relationship between revolutionary organizations and broader anti-capitalist movements?

Indu Viasbistink: First of all, I think it's important to define and clarify what we're talking about. When I think of "anti-capitalist" movements I think of movements that consist of many different individuals and organizations without an ideological commonality. In terms of revolutionary organizations, the way I generally perceive them is that there is an ideological continuity. They operate within anti-capitalist movements in which there is a wide variety of ideas, where individuals or organizations interact in different ways to convince people of their ideas.

Because they are made up of individuals in a wide range of organizations, movements tend to be pretty amorphous and change their shape and momentum very easily. So there's a lot of meetings, and consensus decision-making is generally the way that things are worked out. Within consensus decision-making there is an attempt to move forward by trying to find common ground amongst people working with very different ideological frameworks. Movements tend to contain a variety of people and of views and sometimes to support a diversity of tactics, which I think is an interesting thing.

One of the problems, though, is the fact that the organizing is very *ad hoc* and it doesn't leave any political memory behind. The result is that any time there is an upsurge, you have to reinvent what it's going to look like. Some people would argue that that's the way it really should be because everything should change in the course of the struggle. I find being involved in the same meetings with the same people over and over again and to be always reinventing everything kind of frustrating. The other side is that you're not really reinventing and are just pretending that you are. So people will say "Two years ago we did this and it worked really well so let's try this again," but there is no structured or formal way of recording the history of how things have worked, so it becomes frustrating.

In anti-capitalist movements there is a drive that comes from certain people but not from a group as a whole, so there are certain leaders that do emerge but generally it's an informal leadership. This can create a strong tension between organizations that believe in leadership and those that don't.

Within revolutionary organizations, because people think they come from ideologically the same place, decision-making is done in a much more structured manner. Not that consensus doesn't have a place, but I mean structured in that generally there's a committee that drives the organization and is responsible for where the organization is at. Conversely, with revolutionary organizations, I think that they can be too solid and that often there isn't enough room for change in terms of dealing with a new political context.

I think it would be interesting to think about how to negotiate between these two forms of organization and to find ways to have structures that are more permanent, that will keep some sort of memory, understandings of tactics, and analysis and make sure there is a process for interpreting what's going on, so it's not every person for themselves. In terms of organizing, we're not very good at interpreting what's going on within our own organizations and what's happening within our own movements and in our own interpersonal dynamics. We exist in a capitalist society, but we're trying to be anti-capitalist, so how do we overturn the social relations that we have between us?

I think that marrying the two ideas might help to come up with ways that are more sustainable in terms of moving forward. It's hard to say, because ideological rifts make it hard for people to work together for extended periods of time. I don't know if that can be overcome but

I'm hopeful. There are definite benefits to both kinds of organizing, but there are also definite tensions between them.

UTA: How about the tension between movement building and revolutionary organizing? You have some experience in a revolutionary socialist organization: what did you find worked in terms of the approach and what didn't? What lessons did you take from that?

IV: What I really enjoyed about being involved in a revolutionary organization was the importance placed on analysis and education. People in the organization had a vast amount of knowledge, and people were interested in ideas and hungry for analysis and there was a heavy level of debate at the time that I was involved. If people didn't agree with the analysis of the leadership it was challenged.

I feel that in some of the anti-capitalist organizing that I've been involved in, debate happens in a very passive aggressive way. It's not done openly, so the competition of ideas gets very skewed in some ways. It's often like "Oh, but we have to build a demo on the 20th, so we don't have time to talk about this or that," so debate is left by the wayside until it culminates and suddenly you have one organization "hating" another organization, etc. That's one of the contradictions I've seen a lot.

Within anti-capitalist structures, or rather informal/ non-structures, there is not much common analysis beyond the idea that we're working towards a vague common goal, and maybe that's just "anti-capitalism," you know, getting rid of capitalism and we'll figure it all out later. But there's not much room for debate because the strongest personalities will say what they have to say and there's no time or energy put into making discussions like this happen. It's frustrating because I don't know what person X sitting next to me thinks, and maybe that person believes in tactics that I don't believe in, but the culture discourages the asking and resolution of those questions.

That kind of debate is always very much under the surface and it often leads to a kind of concentration or hierarchy of people at different levels in anti-capitalist organizing. One level of people will know that this or that is going to happen, or people say "we know that this group and that group won't get along and so we won't tell them and we'll hide it under 'security culture.'" I've seen it happen more than once where it's like: "We can't let everyone know about this tactic because what if the cops find out." But you need to be clear with the people that

you're organizing with. The whole idea is that we're standing shoulder to shoulder, but because it's not worked out and not discussed it ends up producing hierarchies. Hierarchies of knowledge and information, hierarchies of "radicalism" and hierarchies of tactics. I think that this is a result of not having those discussions in a structured way in order to try to deal with disagreements.

UTA: That brings me to another thing I wanted to ask about. One criticism that you sometimes hear is that while a lot of anti-capitalist organizing operates with an anti-leadership orientation, in practice there is a leadership, it's just that it's informal and shifting so it's often unclear to people what is going on. What do you think?

IV: I think the leadership question is very important. What happens is that, yes, an informal leadership is created, but the people that are ordained leaders don't necessarily want it, so that creates a pretty interesting dynamic. I think that there is definitely this tension. We do create leaders, but on the other hand sometimes people outside the anti-capitalist movement, who don't understand the idea of not having leaders, reporters or whatever, will be like "Who's in charge?" That might be the media liaison but that's not the person in charge. People don't get that that's how we function so there's also an outside imposition of leaders.

It's a misleading process. We really need to figure out a way to have discussion and structure so it's not just one person that's speaking for the movement but there's actually some kind of level of consensus when people are speaking. This relates to another part of the movement we haven't touched on, which is the question of individualism versus collectivity. There's this idea that movement building is building a collective of individuals. I don't know if I would necessarily agree with that, if we have some kind of political connection and we work more as a collective than as individuals. I think that has a lot to do with the leadership question. A lot of people that actually are leaders say "I'm speaking as an individual," but in fact everyone knows they're speaking for a collective, or we may not know it but that's how it's perceived. So there is this negotiation that needs to be done. I don't know where we'll have the time and space to make these discussions happen, but it's important to make this happen.

UTA: You mentioned that by default those who end up acting as leaders are those that are most active, in the activist sense, in movements. Do you think that this prevents finding

sustainable levels of activity that can appeal to a broader layer of people, since not everybody can afford to be a full-time activist?

IV: That's the most important question, and I don't know what that balance is. I like to think that we can find that balance, but the way that things are structured in the organizations that I see it often seems like an all or nothing proposition, and that's a serious problem. I think that causes some of the boom and bust cycles that are going on. People see this person putting in 15 hours a day and people think that others expect that of them. That is a model that's out there, and the "uber-activist" dynamic that this ends up creating within the movement itself is interesting.

When people burn out other people are forced to step up or you're told that you have to step up, so it does circulate leadership in a way. We tend to have this intense fear of not wanting to be overrun by things, but at the same time of being very committed and excited. I think there needs to be ways of doing open organizing where people can insert themselves and contribute as much as they can or want. Maybe there's a way forward and maybe in a downturn these things are going to get worked out, in terms of figuring out sustainable levels of commitment over the long term.

In the revolutionary organization I was involved in, I put in a lot of energy and was very vocal. I've come to realize that this is partly why my ideas were taken into account. That's why I think the consensus model is a very good thing, to the extent that it allows for more people to get into debates. Democratic centralization tends to be centralized first, and democratized afterwards, so I think there are definite benefits to other forms.

UTA: Do you have any final thoughts?

IV: A combination between consensus decision-making and democratic centralism would be super exciting. If I were ever to be a part of another revolutionary organization, that would have to be an important part of it. A really interesting thing is how decision-making happens in movements. Consensus was developed in the 70s, in the context of identity politics, and democratic centralism was developed way before that, in a very different context. One of our profound failures is that we haven't developed a mechanism or a method to make decisions and be clear and open and honest with each other and by default we've fallen into other practices.

I've seen great things happen organically. I was involved in a coalition that was attempting to use consensus but almost all the members of the coalition were different union locals that didn't know how to use consensus. There was this organic decision-making process that was developed out of it. It was totally flawed in every way but it was also amazing to see it happen week by week. At every meeting you would see these union guys trying to "twinkle" and you would see the chair try to "call to order." People were trying to understand each other and that's exciting. If we keep working in those kinds of ways we can develop a method where decision-making and leadership have a very close correlation, and if we start working on it we can see that there might be ways to develop an organic synthesis.

I've learned that in moments of struggle the most amazing things can happen in terms of organizing because we adapt to our context. We just need to tap into that a little more, be aware of what our context is, and not be so goal oriented in terms of our next rally or whatever. We have to begin to think long term, we have to build sustainable organizations and coalitions that don't fall apart after a year. The way to do it is to look at longevity and also what's going to be sustainable in every way, as well as to develop mechanisms to preserve that sustainability. Whether it's decision-making or anything else, we need to be more creative in the ways we interact with each other. ★

Jeff Shantz is a member of Punching Out-NEFAC (North-Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists) and lives in Toronto. This interview was conducted electronically and is based on Jeff's article "Platformism' and Organization" submitted to Upping the Anti in March 2005.

UTA: To begin with, maybe you could outline your general perspective on why there is a need for revolutionary organization?

Jeff Shantz: NEFAC members believe that achieving a classless, stateless and non-hierarchical society (that is, anarchy) requires a social revolution, which will only emerge through autonomous social movements and the revolutionary self-activity of the working class. This distinguishes us from some versions of social anarchism, which, drawing most notably on the works of Kropotkin, for example, view the development towards anarchy as an ongoing trend within human

social development that requires little effort by anarchists beyond the propaganda of anarchist ideas.

While we draw upon the diverse histories, movements and theorists of anarchism, NEFAC is inspired most significantly by the tradition within anarchist communism known as "platformism." The platformist tradition emerged following the Russian Revolution through the efforts of a group of Russian and Ukrainian anarchists in exile who sought to analyze why the anarchists had fared so badly during the revolution in comparison with the Bolsheviks. Their conclusion was that despite their vastly better social and political analysis the anarchists lacked effective organizations.

In order that anarchists not make the same mistake in future generations, the Dielo Truda group wrote a position paper, *The Organizational Platform for a General Union of Anarchists*, in which they laid out some points that might serve as a guide in developing effective revolutionary organizations. More than 75 years after it was written and a decade after the fall of the U.S.S.R. the platform has enjoyed a stunning revival. From Ireland and Lebanon to South Africa and Canada, a number of groups have taken up the platform. At a time when anarchist movements are growing, the platform – which was only ever intended as an outline for action – has provided a useful starting point for anarchists looking "to rally all the militants of the organized anarchist movement."

Unlike the original platformists, who focused their energies on gathering the majority of anarchists to their perspective, NEFAC has been more concerned with moving beyond activist circles and building a real grounding in working class communities and organizations. Obviously, however, we remain a small force and have no illusions about our success in doing this up to now. It remains a long and ongoing process.

UTA: How do you, as a relatively small revolutionary organization, relate to these broader movements, whether particular social movements and community struggles, or the workers' movement more generally?

JS: In order to most effectively direct our limited resources, NEFAC has decided as a federation to focus on three primary areas of struggle: anti-racism and anti-fascism, anti-poverty struggles, and workplace organizing. Regarding the first area, we are involved not just in street scraps with fascists, but in trying to work against the US/Canada border enforcement, and in stopping the increasing detention

of migrants. Our anti-poverty work in several cities has dug us into tenants unions and other community-based organizations, as well as contributing to campaigns aimed at winning what we realize to be very limited demands from the state, such as the Raise the Rates campaign spearheaded by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty in Ontario.

It is in labour struggles that we have really been innovators, doing things that are quite atypical for many North American anarchist organizations. Indeed the goal of developing anarchist perspectives within unions and other workplace organizations is one that contemporary North American anarchists have generally neglected. Unlike left groups that have focused their energies on running opposition slates in union elections or forming opposition caucuses, NEFAC unionists work to develop rank-and-file organization and militance. We take the position that regardless of the union leadership, until we build a militant and mobilized rank-and-file movement, across locals and workplaces, the real power of organized labour will remain unrealized.

A few of the efforts our members have been involved in include flying squads -rapid-response networks of union members prepared to take direct solidarity actions- and alternative or minority unions like the Downtown Workers Union in Montpelier, Vermont which organizes service workers citywide. In Toronto, Punching Out has been active in forming an autonomous flying squad to co-ordinate strike support and help build workers' self-organization and solidarity. The flying squad is autonomous from all official union structures and is open to rank-and-file workers who hold no union position or workers in unorganized workplaces or who are unemployed. The flying squad supports direct action against bosses of all types. Based on these examples, NEFAC members in Peterborough and Montreal have recently taken part in developing flying squad networks in their cities. The Precarious Workers Network coalescing in Montreal is primarily organizing among unorganized and unemployed workers.

UTA: How does this work relate to your attempt to build an “effective revolutionary organization”? What are the principles on which you organize as such?

JS: The anarchist organization is a place to come together to reflect on, revise and advance work being done. It offers the opportunity to examine and refine one's practices and develop alternatives through the sharing of resources and the evaluation of experiences from different collectives in different areas of our region.

NEFAC's commitment to local autonomy means that collectives have the final say on which of these struggles they will involve themselves in and what sorts of activities they will take up. At the same time, we are a federation and we do discuss, debate and plan federation-wide initiatives. Our cohesion as a federation is based on “theoretical and tactical unity” and in order to develop this in a vital way, in addition to federal campaigns, we also prepare position papers on our areas of intervention, which are reviewed and accepted (or not) by the federation as a whole.

As a platformist organization NEFAC seeks a substantive, rather than symbolic, unity based on shared action and reflection. By “theoretical and tactical unity” we mean a focused sharing of resources and energies that brings otherwise limited anarchist forces together rather than dissipating our efforts. Theoretical and tactical unity in no way implies that members have to read the same sources or agree on all points. While there has to be some agreement on basic ideas, these positions are only determined collectively, through open debate and discussion, rooted in actual practice.

As a federation, we meet twice a year for federal congresses, which serve as the highest decision-making body in NEFAC. These congresses are open to all NEFAC members and supporters and decisions on federation-wide projects are taken on the basis of majority vote by members/collectives with supporters having indicative votes. Between congresses, federal decisions are made in a democratic manner through our Federation Council consisting of one delegate per collective. Delegates are responsible for bringing proposals to their collective for discussion and vote. If a majority of collectives agrees to the proposal, it passes. Once a decision is taken by the federation as a whole, it is expected that members and collectives will responsibly carry out those decisions.

UTA: What do you see as the role of revolutionaries/revolutionary organizations in relation to broader community struggles, social movements, and the workers' movement more generally?

JS: We are not a vanguardist or substitutionist organization, but we do believe that a successful revolution will be preceded by organizations capable of radicalizing mass movements and community struggles while opposing reformist or authoritarian tendencies. We provide a venue in which militants can analyze experiences and put ideas into practice while making anarchist communist ideas relevant.

As an active minority within the working class, we work to provide a rallying point, through example and ideas, in struggles against capital and the state as well as standing against authoritarian ideologies or practices in working class organizations. We remain small and certainly have no illusions about “leading” the anarchist movement, let alone the working class more broadly. We try to maintain relationships of solidarity and mutual aid with anarchists who take different strategic and tactical approaches.

UTA: What do you see as the potential contradictions or tensions that can/ do arise between building revolutionary organizations and “movement building”? How can these tensions be negotiated and overcome?

JS: Given the marginalized position of anarchist and communist ideas within the working class in North America at this point in time we do have to spend a fair bit of effort getting our perspectives out there. Thus we do focus on developing agitational materials like our theoretical magazine “The Northeastern Anarchist” and our newspaper “Strike!” There are many important lessons from anarchist history that we need to learn, revive and share. At the same time, the work we have put into building rank-and-file workers’ committees, flying squads, precarious workers’ networks and tenant/base unions shows that, despite our numbers, we can make real material contributions to building the capacities of our class for struggle. These interventions are not made in a vanguardist way to build our organization or recruit members but in a principled way to help build class-wide resources and win material gains.

This gets at your larger question around contradictions or tensions. First, I think it is mistaken to speak of a “pure” or “essential” movement that is somehow free from or untouched by revolutionary organizations. Movements are made up of diverse organizations and involve participation from people who are also active in a variety of organizations, including revolutionary ones. This includes both formal organizations and, often more significantly, the informal organizations, including cliques, social networks and friendship groups that often operate behind the scenes to impact movements dramatically. The interplay of perspectives and practices that participants bring to movements shapes their emergence and development. The question then is how people approach their involvement in specific movements. It is clearly a mistake to approach movements either as recruitment grounds (as more formal organizations often do) or as social clubs (as

is more typical for informal groups). For us the key is to be involved in a principled way that prioritizes building working class strength in our communities, neighbourhoods and workplaces rather than building our specific organization. Developing our particular organization is worthwhile only in as much as it contributes to that larger goal.

UTA: Do you have any final thoughts?

JS: Much of anarchist activity in North America is still characterized by this description from Dielo Trouda in 1926: “local organizations advocating contradictory theories and practices, having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them.” Many of these short lived projects are based on the ‘synthesist’ model – a mish-mash of ideas and practices – of which platformists have always been wary. Such groupings work relatively well if the task remains at the level of running a bookstore or free school (both worthy projects in themselves). Yet, the absence of durable anarchist organizations, rooted in working class organizations and communities, still contributes to demoralization or a retreat into subculturalism.

As anarchist movements face possibilities of growth, as happened after Seattle in 1999, questions of organization and the relation of various anarchist activities to each other and to broader movements for social change will only become more pressing and significant. As PJ Lilley and I have suggested elsewhere: “If anarchists are to seize the opportunities presented by recent upsurges in anarchist activity and build anarchism in movements that have resonance in wider struggles, then we must face seriously the challenges of organization, of combining and coordinating our efforts effectively. We will be aided in this by drawing upon the lessons of past experiences and avoiding, as much as possible, past errors.” ★

Book Reviews

***Undoing Gender* by Judith Butler, Routledge, 2004**

Reviewed by Erin Gray

In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler develops upon her earlier work in gender and queer theory. Butler, a professor in Rhetoric, Comparative Literature, and Women's Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, is best known for the groundbreaking *Gender Trouble*, in which she outlined her theory of gender performativity and the construction of sexuality. Since *Undoing Gender* appeared in 1990, feminist, queer, and literary work in the humanities has been heavily influenced by Butler's nuanced exposure of gender's construction. Moving beyond a binary frame in which gender is assumed to signify an essential self, Butler exposes the categories of sex, desire and gender as effects of specific power structures. Focusing more on linguistic action than on a theatrical sense of performativity, Butler defines the latter as a stylized repetition of acts that produces the effect of an internal, natural core on the surface of the body. Because gender is often assumed to be an extension of natural interiority, its sociality and public function is often overlooked. Butler's emphasis on the simultaneity of improvisation/performance and constraint underscores the paradoxical nature of gendered identity construction. In Butler's analysis, this is apparent in gender parodies such as drag, which, though parodic, is not necessarily subversive. Butler's work has helped further expose the foundational categories of sex, desire and gender as effects of specific power structures, thus moving beyond a binary frame in which gender is assumed to signify an essential self.

As in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), *Undoing Gender* takes from *Gender Trouble* much of its conceptual and theoretical frameworks, but situates a critique of the production of gender norms within a materially-based understanding of the complex relationship between survival and social transformation. Where *Gender Trouble* largely focused on gender as a *doing*, here Butler is concerned with *undoing*, or unperforming, hegemonic modes of gender and sexuality.

Gender is defined in *Undoing Gender* as a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint," one that is always within a social context, and never outside of ideology (1). In her introduction, Butler writes that *Undoing Gender* offers an understanding of how "restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" might be undone

(1). Butler stresses throughout the book that this process of undoing is not necessarily negative or positive, but is instead caught up in the paradoxical tension between societal-mediated survival and individual agency. Butler reminds us that one does not author one's gender, for its terms are always negotiated within collective social contexts (1). In "Undiagnosing Gender," for example, she addresses the tension within transsexual communities around the diagnosis of gender-identity disorder (GID). The tension arises because, though the diagnosis is an economic necessity in order for transsexuals to gain access to funds for sex-change operations, the diagnosis is inherently pathologizing in its conflation of transsex with disorder. Many people in trans communities view the diagnosis of GID as an institutional barrier to transautonomy, as it forces transsexuals to conform to the discursive power of the medical and psychoanalytic communities. Butler points out that the diagnosis, necessary under capitalism for economic access to surgery, exacerbates the tension between autonomy and community, as transsexuals must submit to discourse in order to gain autonomy at the level of the body (100). We are never, Butler reminds us, able to remove ourselves from ideology, and we must work with the dominant ideology's tools in order to subvert its material effects.

In *Undoing Gender*, Butler seems to be fighting off critics' accusations that *Gender Trouble* espoused a humanist desire for gendered autonomy, as she argues that individual bodily agency is conditional on its place within a collective whole; "not only does one need the social world to be a certain way in order to lay claim to what is one's own, but it turns out that what is one's own is always from the start dependent upon what is not one's own, the social conditions by which autonomy is, strangely, dispossessed and undone" (100).

Desire, for Butler, is bound up with questions of power and social normativity. Asking what gender *wants*, Butler links desire with recognition in a Hegelian sense. It is through the experience of recognition, she writes, that people are constituted as social beings (2). Butler expands Hegel's notion of recognition to point out that, since the terms by which we are recognizable are constituted socially, they are also alterable.

There is an implicit tension between desiring norms in order to survive, and maintaining a critical distance from them. For Butler, a critical relationship to norms depends on a collective ability to articulate alternative, oppositional "norms" that necessitate *action* (3). *Doing*, stresses Butler, is tied to being; "if I have any agency, it is opened

up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility” (3). It is this paradox that Butler investigates throughout the book, specifically in regards to the question of critical social transformation. This transformation of norms, Butler repeatedly reminds us, comes from within an understanding of how one is constituted by them. If *Gender Trouble*'s main concern was with exploring the dynamics through which genders are constructed and performed, *Undoing Gender* is concerned with the question of *survival*-based undoings, performative resistance at the level of both ideology and the body, and which is, importantly, always social and collective.

In examining how bodies are normalized and made “human,” Butler explicitly concerns herself with the question of autonomy. Choosing one’s own body means navigating among norms, and individual agency is bound up with societal critique and social transformation. One’s personal gender is determined to the extent that social norms support and enable acts of claiming.

Butler also looks at the various ways in which humans are normalized *as human*. She importantly points to the connections between these types of gender discrimination, gender violence, and the harsh normalizing mode of the promotion of gay and lesbian marriage: “the critical question [...] becomes, how might the world be reorganized so that this conflict can be ameliorated?” (5). In the case of gay and lesbian marriage, for example, she writes that gay and lesbian kinship forms are not recognized as kinship unless they mimic a heterosexual familial structure (102). This normative family form is predicated upon recognition from the state, a site for the articulation of the fantasy of normativity, legitimation, and anonymity. Like GID and surgery on intersexed babies, gay and lesbian marriage diagnoses and institutes gender norms, but norms which are necessary in order for many people to survive.

In detailing the paradox of autonomy, Butler writes that, until society is radically altered, freedom will continue to require unfreedom, and autonomy subjection. She does not however, offer an explanation of how the paradox of autonomy, or, more precisely, the relationship between gender normalization and gender self-fashioning, may be resolved within a wider process of social transformation. This is, obviously, out of the stated scope of Butler’s text, but something

which needs to be articulated between gender and queer theory, and connected to anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist theory and practice.

Butler has been criticized for replacing so-called “real” politics with symbolic politics, leaving little room for large-scale social change. Professor Martha Nussbaum, in an article in *The New Republic*, accuses Butler of “hip quietism” and a pessimistic, amoral, anarchic disavowal of the law and social normativity. Her view of politics, according to Nussbaum, is oddly pessimistic in its poststructuralist belief that there is no agent prior to social forces that produce the self. Though Butler repeatedly stresses agency and the need for resistance, Nussbaum questions where this ability comes from if autonomy may only be sought by parodying dominant discourses and practices; “there is a void, then, at the heart of Butler’s notion of politics. This void can look liberating, because the reader fills it implicitly with a normative theory of human equality or dignity. But then we have to articulate those norms—and this Butler refuses to do.”

Nussbaum’s critique was published in response to *Gender Trouble* and *Excitable Speech*, and focuses largely on Butler’s “difficult,” academic writing style. Though Butler, who was trained in philosophy at Yale, may be inaccessible to those who have no previous experience in the work of the theorists she references, *Undoing Gender* is an arguably easier read than some of her earlier work. While this may merely be the result of my having marginal experience with Butler’s ideas, there is still something to be said for Butler’s tenacious emphasis on subversion, even while she recognizes how difficult that subversion may be. And it is not as though Butler has no experience in activism; she has worked in AIDS activism within queer communities, and is an outspoken, and harshly criticized, Jewish anti-Zionist.

Gender is a project of cultural survival, a strategy, and, as stated earlier, *acts* of gender create the idea of gender. The relevance of theory for activism has been contentious in both the academy and on the street, with many radical theorists, from Marx to bell hooks, pointing out the need to theorize oppositional consciousness and action. Theoretical practice helps destabilize the binary on which dominant modes of thought have worked to create marked rifts between how we define ourselves in relation to others. Butler’s emphasis on survival and on the relationship between the tactile and the discursive, emphasizes how neo-liberal rhetoric plays itself out on the real bodies of the disenfranchised.

Butler's emphasis on the extent to which our bodies have a public dimension reminds us that struggling for autonomy requires a struggle for a conception of the self within a community; "to live is to live a life politically, in relation to power, in relation to others, in the act of assuming responsibility for a collective future" (39). Emotions such as desire, mourning, and rage allow people to relate to others, as they enact an undoing of the self, and allow for an apprehension of the social dimensions of embodied life. Grief and rage, therefore, have implications for activism, as they allow people to return to a source of vulnerability, to a collective responsibility for our physical lives (23).

Butler therefore, steps away from the largely inaccessible tone of *Gender Trouble* in order to explore the complex relationship between social power and the embodiment of gender norms, as well as the terms through which agency and survival may be articulated. Focusing on the relationship between feminist and queer politics and radical democratic theory, *Undoing Gender* is influenced by how "New Gender Politics" (social movements concerned with transgender, transsexuality, intersex, feminist, and queer politics) may work together to construct a future of resistance.

Undoing Gender is thus indispensable not only for feminist, queer and transsexed investigations of philosophical and practical social change, but is useful for wider anti-imperialist work as well. It is precisely our task, as anti-heterosexist activists, to articulate the relationship between the radical ideologies we embody and how we perform gender and grassroots politics. Butler's philosophical musings on subjectivity, and the conditions required by current social relations for one to be considered a living, human subject, have implications for our collective struggles against capital and empire, and, as well as asking how we may subversively undo gender, we can also ask how all oppressive structures may be undone. As Butler contends, queer politics are about resisting assimilation, and remaking reality at the level of the body: "to intervene in the name of transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality and to use ...one's unreality to make an otherwise impossible or illegible claim" (27). Desire is itself a transformative activity, and it is our task, as radicals, to perform our resistance, our desire for change, and to demand the impossible.

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***Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*
by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 2004.
Reviewed by D. Oswald Mitchell**

One approach to understanding the democracy of the multitude is as an open-source society, that is, a society whose source code is revealed so that we can all work collaboratively to solve its bugs.

- Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, (340)

After the unprecedented commercial and critical success of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's dense and manic *Empire* (2000), which the Marxist critic Frederic Jameson called "the first great new theoretical synthesis of the new millennium," and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek praised as "nothing less than a rewriting of *The Communist Manifesto* for our time," the publication of its sequel, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), has generated a significant amount of interest. *Empire's* theorization of "a fundamentally new form of rule," a new global sovereignty that transcends both national borders and modern imperialism, was eagerly seized upon by many in the anti-globalization movement and the academic Left seeking a theoretical framework for naming that-which-they-opposed, in place of the vague and inaccurate term "globalization." Hardt and Negri's new book *Multitude* picks up where *Empire* left off, theorizing the potential forms that popular resistance to Empire might take.

Empire concludes with a gesture toward the "potential political power" of the social mass they designate "the multitude," the source of any viable counter-force to Empire. But in *Empire* Hardt and Negri consistently refused to describe or plot the development of such an entity (which, they confess, has not yet emerged as a social force), other than to affirm that "only the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and determine when and how the possible becomes real" (411). Beyond this, *Empire* offers only vague gestures towards its potential form and composition, and the unknowable (and unexplained) "event" that will bring it to maturity.

In spite of all its similarities of topic, theoretical foundations, and audience, *Multitude* is actually a rather different book than its predecessor: more modest, more disciplined, more accessible. For

along with the sometimes hyperbolic praise *Empire* received, it also generated a great deal of criticism.¹ Perhaps the most widespread criticism was for its lack of groundedness: for all its relevance to the spirit of the times and the true brilliance of its analysis, *Empire* sometimes reads like a poorly-translated Japanese instruction manual, as in its authors' agile hands, the gap between theory and practice sometimes opens into a yawning chasm of specialist lingo and pseudo-militant sloganeering.²

Like Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, *Empire* had the good fortune of surfacing in the immediate wake of the anti-globalization movement's coming-out party in Seattle, and so found itself suddenly thrust into the media spotlight. As newly-energized activists looked to it for guidance and direction, the public looked to it for explanations, and anti-intellectual right-wing pundits looked to it for ammunition. Its ideas received more widespread scrutiny and debate than – let's be honest – most leftist academics usually dream of, and thus forced upon its authors a degree of accountability that many intellectuals rarely face. And it appears that Hardt and Negri have taken a number of the criticisms the book received to heart. It is to their enormous credit that in their sequel, the authors have largely emerged from the depths of extreme abstraction to re-engage with the social movements that carry the hope driving their project, and with the larger public that is, presumably, sympathetic to their most basic demands for true democracy, freedom from poverty, and an end to war. As a result, *Multitude* is a work of political philosophy in the best sense of the term, providing a critical rethinking of some of our most basic political concepts – democracy, sovereignty, representation, and so on – in the context of the new global networks of power and communication that increasingly regulate social and political life. The stated aim of their investigation is to “work out the conceptual bases on which a new project of democracy can stand” (xvii). Faced with the debacle of modern representative democracy, they call on us to reclaim the concept of democracy in its radical, utopian sense: the *absolute democracy* of “the rule of everyone by everyone” (307). The multitude, they argue, is the first and only social subject capable of realizing such a project.

Multitude is divided into three sections: War, Multitude, and Democracy. The first section seeks to account for the general global state of war in which we find ourselves, and through which, Hardt and Negri argue, power is increasingly expressed. (This section represents,

in part, an attempt to elaborate their theorization of Empire in the wake of the September 2001 attacks on US soil and Bush's declaration of “war on terror.”)

In the second section, Hardt and Negri sketch out their conception of the multitude and highlight the tendencies that make it possible. Here they argue that the shift from industrial to post-industrial societies has been accompanied by a shift in the dominant form of labour, from industrial labour to more “immaterial” forms of work – the production of social relations, communication, feelings, ideas, etc. (which they term *biopolitical production*) – and that this deep shift is profoundly reorganizing many aspects of our lives, including the very ways we interact and organize ourselves. Hardt and Negri propose that what our labour increasingly produces is *the common* – a crucial concept to their project, the basis upon which any democratic project will be built. Conceived in these terms, they propose a description of the multitude as “an open network of singularities that links together on the basis of the common they share and the common they produce” – a union which does not, however, in any way subordinate or erase the radical differences among those singularities.³

The last section, Democracy, looks specifically at the diverse and growing demands for real democracy erupting around the globe, and catalogues the myriad reforms that are being put forward to democratize the global system. Against this backdrop of collective desire, the final section of the book offers a productive reading of the modern political concepts of *representation* and *sovereignty*, exploring how an emerging democratic project might usefully remake or resist these concepts.

My only major criticism of *Multitude* is an environmentalist one, or perhaps a materialist one. Its analysis is grounded in an unspoken faith in the continuing abundance of material resources to fuel the “immaterial” economy, when in reality the looming spectres of “peak oil” production and dramatic climate change represent a very real limit to their notions of the dominance of “immaterial” wealth and labour. Hardt and Negri seem, in fact, dangerously blind to how finite the raw resources are that keep every aspect of our economy humming along. “Some resources do remain scarce today,” they write, “but many, in fact, particularly the newest elements of the economy, do not operate on a logic of scarcity.” They predict that the growing abundance of “immaterial property” (knowledge, ideas, etc.), which is “infinitely

reproducible, ... will make “the notion of a basic conflict with everyone [over scarce resources] seem increasingly unnatural” (311).

It’s a nice thought. In fact, such cooperative group action is already clearly evident in such promising formations as the open-source software movement and the Creative Commons initiative, which are revolutionizing the ways people engage in collaborative production and think about intellectual property. But we would be foolish to ignore the dark clouds that overshadow such a bright future: in October 2003, for instance, the Pentagon issued a confidential report (which the Bush regime did its best to suppress) predicting that by 2020, the effects of climate change will be causing mega-droughts, famine, and nuclear conflicts over scarce resources across the world. “Disruption and conflict will be endemic features of life,” the report concluded. “Once again, warfare would define human life.”⁴ One might legitimately question the conclusions of such a report, but we gain nothing by ignoring such predictions, and stand to lose everything.

For years I’ve nursed the cynical and slightly paranoid theory that the main point of the reality TV show *Survivor* was to accustom people to the idea that, in a world of scarce resources where there just isn’t enough wealth to go around (at least, not at the desired rate of consumption), *democracy* becomes nothing more than the process of “voting” the most marginalized elements of society “off the island” (after following the recent debates about US budget priorities, I’ve begun to wonder how far off such a system of garrison-democracy actually is.) The point is this: a truly progressive inquiry into the potential for real democracy at a global scale had better start grappling with the looming twin crises of fossil fuel scarcity and profound climate change, because all the wrong people are *already* retooling “democracy” for a world of scarcity – real, imagined, or imposed.

In spite of this serious oversight, *Multitude* still represents an important advance in our attempts to make sense of the profound societal shifts accompanying the rise of network forms of both resistance and control, and the possibilities for a better world that these shifts might enable.⁵ And *Multitude* actually stands alone quite well: if you’ve never cracked *Empire* but are curious, *Multitude* is a good place to start. If you picked up a copy of *Empire* a couple of years back and stalled 60 pages in, but remain interested in the ideas it grapples with, *Multitude* merits a look. If you read *Empire* and were excited by the ideas, but just wished sometimes they could express them a little

more clearly, or relate them more directly to real-world struggles, *Multitude* is the book you’ll wish they’d written first.

NOTES:

¹Leftist sociologist James Petras, for example, dismissed *Empire* as “a wordy exercise devoid of critical intelligence,” and “a sweeping synthesis of the intellectual froth about globalization, post-modernism, [and] post-Marxism, all held together by a series of unsubstantiated arguments and assumptions which seriously violate economic and historical realities” <<http://www.rebellion.org/petras/english/negri1010102.htm>>. “Theorizing at the level of absolute abstraction,” quipped the right-wing *National Review*, “the book is almost free from fact, history, or plain statement” (David Pryce-Jones, “Evil Empire: The Communist ‘hot, smart book’ of the moment,” *National Review* 17 Sept. 2001). Alan Wolfe in *The New Republic* pilloried it as “a lazy person’s guide to revolution” <http://www.tnr.com/100101/wolfe100101_print.html>. And finally, voicing the legitimate frustrations of countless readers, George Monbiot confessed on his blog, “There’s a game I sometimes play with my friends, which is to open [*Empire*] at random, put your finger on a paragraph, and see if you can work out what the hell it means[...]. They have some important things to say. I just wish they had said them more economically” <<http://www.monbiot.com/archives/2003/12/04/december-debate-part-1/>>.

²For a glimpse of *Empire* at its most obtuse and esoteric, see the section “New Barbarians” (214-18).

³“The multitude,” write Hardt and Negri, “is composed of radical differences, singularities, that can never be synthesized in an identity. The radicality of gender difference, for example, can be included in the biopolitical organization of social life, the life renovated by the multitude, only when every discipline of labour, affect, and power that makes gender difference into an index of hierarchy is destroyed” (*Multitude* 355).

⁴Mark Townsend and Paul Harris, “Now the Pentagon Tells Bush: Climate Change Will Destroy Us,” *Observer/UK* 22 Feb. 2004.

⁵For other explorations of the implications of these profound biopolitical shifts, see Siva Vaidhyanathan’s artfully-written and startlingly original *The Anarchist in the Library: How the Clash Between Freedom and Control is Hacking the Real World and Crashing the System* (2004); Manuel Castells’ *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000), the first volume of his exhaustive *The Information Age* trilogy; and Big Noise Film’s powerful and lyrical documentary *The Fourth World War* (2004).