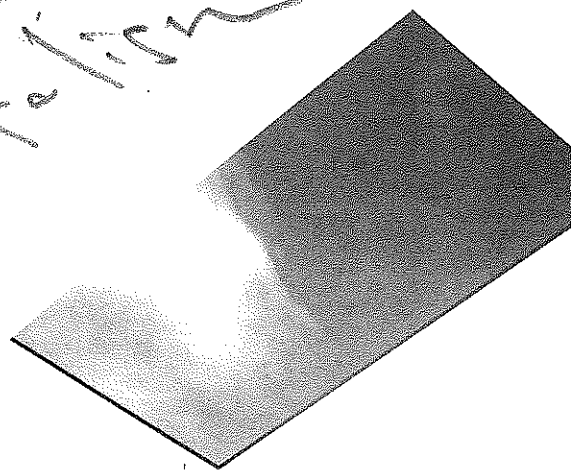


Ch. 6
Democracy
Capitalism



Another World Is Possible

Globalization & Anti-Capitalism

REVISED EXPANDED EDITION

DAVID McNALLY

- 128 As quote by Elich, p. 40.
- 129 Scott Ritter, "Don't blame Saddam for this one," *Guardian* (London), October 19, 2001.
- 130 As quoted by John Pilger, "The truths they never tell us," *New Statesman*, November 26, 2001.
- 131 CBS News, "Plans for Iraq Attack Began on 9/11," September 4, 2002.
- 132 For just one example of doctored US government intelligence and the culpability of major American media in presenting it as truth see David E. Sanger and David Barstow, "Report Leaked by Cheney Aide Was in Dispute," *New York Times*, April 9, 2006.
- 133 See www.iraqbodycount.org.
- 134 See "Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey," published online October 29, 2004 at <http://image.thelancet.com/extras/04art10342web.pdf>.
- 135 Sabrina Tavernise, "U.S. Quietly Issues Estimate of Iraqi Civilian Casualties," *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 2005.
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- 137 Michael Gawenda, "US rejects claims of torture," *The Age* (Melbourne), February 18, 2006; : "Top soldier in Iraq okayed illegal methods, ACLU says," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), March 30, 2005 A newer US inquiry has also documented widespread abuse at American prison camps at Guantanamo Bay. See Neil A. Lewis and Eric Schmitt, "Inquiry Finds Abuses at Guantanamo Bay," *New York Times*, May 1, 2005.
- 138 See Peter Maass, "The Way of the Commandos," *New York Times Magazine*, May 1, 2005.
- 139 Amnesty International, *El Salvador: Peace Can Only Be Achieved With Justice* (2001).
- 140 See Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *School of Assassins: Guns, Greed and Globalization* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), pp. 27, 11; and Leslie Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 137. In the face of mounting opposition, the SOA has recently changed its name to the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation.
- 141 Gary Cohn and Ginger Thompson, "Unearthed: Fatal Secrets," *Baltimore Sun*, June 11, 1995, available online at www.geocities.com/ravencrazy/Baltimore-Sun.html.
- 142 John Ibbitson, "U.S. to scrap ABM treaty, sources say," *Globe and Mail*, December 12, 2001.
- 143 See Shalom, p. 38; Pilger, "War on Terror;" Ibbitson.
- 144 Michael Mandel, "This war is illegal and immoral, and it won't prevent terrorism," speech delivered to a Science for Peace conference, Toronto, December 9, 2001, available on the world wide web at www.scienceforpeace.sa.utoronto.ca/Special_Activities/Dec9_Forum.html.
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6. DEMOCRACY AGAINST CAPITALISM: THE REVOLT OF THE DISPOSSESSED

Life is growing ever more precarious for elected South American leaders who advocate market liberalization, privatization and other measures ... Bolivia's Carlos Mesa is the latest victim of a populist uprising ...

Mr. Mesa joins seven other presidents across the continent who have hastily departed office in recent years without being able to finish their terms.

— Editorial, *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 11, 2005

Popular rebellions against neoliberalism have been sweeping Latin America in recent years, toppling presidents and inspiring social movements around the world. Spearheaded by indigenous peoples, the unemployed, poor farmers and trade unionists, mass upheavals have punched huge holes in the neoliberal agenda. As I write these lines, hundreds of landless workers have just invaded the Brazilian Parliament building, demanding land reform.¹ That an event like this should occur the very day I started this chapter is not some odd coincidence. As you read these words, similar events are transpiring somewhere else on our planet. That, too, is an inevitable feature of the age of globalization. Every time neoliberalism tears another hole in the fabric of people's lives, rebellion ensues. The elites know it and have coined a term for such events: "the IMF riot."

Our rulers have a pat response to these rebellions. Troops and riot police are called out to crack heads, hundreds of protesters are arrested, a state of emergency is declared, and basic civil rights are shelved. Then, as if reading from the same script, our governors declare they do it all to defend democracy. In the midst of the mass struggles of 2005 in Bolivia that brought down President Mesa, for instance, Canada's foreign minister called on protesters to end their rebellions and resolve things through "democratic means."² Of course, the protesters refuse this self-serving notion of "democracy." After all, Carlos Mesa was toppled by the largest mass protests in Bolivia's history; on a single day at least half a million people demonstrated through the streets of the capital city, La Paz – in a country of nine million. In fact, by imposing their will, the will of the people, the Bolivian insurgents were reclaiming the very meaning of democracy.

In *Global Showdown*, Barlow and Clarke remind us that in ancient Greece the term democracy was derived from the words "demos," meaning people and "kratos" meaning power. In its classical definition, they point out, democracy thus meant people-power.³ Even this formulation may not be radical enough. For in ancient Greece, the concept of democracy had a deeper meaning: it referred to the power of a specific social class, that is, to the rule of the poor.

This meaning is clearly laid out in one of the great texts of ancient political thought, Aristotle's *Politics*. At various points throughout that work, Aristotle claims that democracy means more than rule of the majority; more precisely, it refers to "a constitution under which the poor rule."⁴ Aristotle's definition was anything but peculiar at the time. In fact, it corresponded to what everybody knew: having emerged as the product of rebellions by the poor, democracy was a movement of the oppressed majority to impress its collective will on political life.

The Origins of Democracy: Rule of the Poor

Early in the sixth century B.C. the struggle for democracy erupted in ancient Greece with rebellions by the poor against intensified social and economic inequalities. Suffering under crushing debt loads which often forced them to relinquish their lands, the poor resisted, agitated and mobilized. In an effort to restore stability, the ruling class decided in 594 B.C. to implement a sweeping set of reforms: debts were abolished; debt bondage was eliminated along with all use of people as security on a debt; new, democratically elected courts were created in opposition to the old courts run by the aristocracy. Alongside these reforms was one that gave all male citizens the right to attend and vote in the Assembly (the law-making body), thus breaking the control of the rich over political life.⁵ For the first time in recorded history, poor men (but not women) were empowered to make the laws by which they were governed.⁶

Until this moment, rulers and law-makers had always been privileged non-labourers, those who enjoyed a life of leisure by living off the labour of others. So unequal were social relations between aristocracy and poor that one poem of the age urged that the best way to treat the *demos* was "to kick them hard."⁷ The democratic revolution in ancient Athens turned this world upside down. Now, the poor – the *demos* – having done some kicking of their own, acquired the power to make the laws by which they were governed. The idea of the self-governing people had entered the human vocabulary, albeit with gender limitations. Arguably the most radical and unprecedented thing about this development, as Ellen Meiksins Wood suggests, is that it represented a "union of labour and citizenship," the idea of the labourer as citizen.⁸ For the first time since class society emerged, men who worked with their hands – farmers, carpenters, ship-builders and others – claimed equal rights with the rich. And given that the labouring poor were the overwhelming majority, this meant proclaiming

the sovereignty of the men of their class – as Aristotle knew when he designated democracy as rule of the poor.

Over the next 130 years, the poor continued to push for reforms that reduced the powers of the aristocrats. Because democracy was something they had struggled for, and because it made such a palpable impact on their lives (particularly for having abolished debts and debt bondage), they were vigilant both in defending and exercising it. Indeed, the system of direct democracy they practiced made it exceptionally difficult for the wealthy to manipulate political life. One historian describes how it worked:

Direct participation was the key to Athenian democracy: there was neither representation nor a civil service or bureaucracy in any significant sense. In the sovereign Assembly, whose authority was total, every citizen was not only entitled to attend as often as he pleased but he also had the right to enter the debate, offer amendments and vote on the proposals on war and peace, taxation, cult regulation, army levies, war finance, public works, treaties and diplomatic negotiations, and anything else, major or minor, which required governmental decision. Much of the preparatory work for these meetings was done by the *boule*, a Council of 500 chosen by lot for one year – and again everyone was eligible, save that no man could be a member more than twice in his lifetime ... There was no hierarchy among the offices; regardless of the significance or insignificance of any post, every holder was responsible directly and solely to the *demos* itself ...⁹

Ancient democracy, for all its limits, was thus much more active, meaningful and participatory than what goes by the name of representative democracy today. As the same scholar points out in another work:

A considerable portion of the male citizens of Athens ... had some direct experience in government beyond anything we know, almost beyond anything we can imagine. It was literally true that at birth every

Athenian boy had better than a gambler's chance to be president of the Assembly, a rotating post held for a single day and, as always, filled by the drawing of lots. He might be a market commissioner for a year or two (though not in succession), a juryman repeatedly, a voting member of the Assembly as frequently as he liked.¹⁰

In addition to being immensely more direct and participatory, ancient democracy was also more extensive in scope. No sphere of public policy was off limits to it. Particularly offensive to the rich was the fact that the Assembly could interfere with property rights – by abolishing debts or redistributing land – and impose limits on their ability to exploit peasants. Rule of the *demos* meant the sovereignty of the citizens over all aspects of social and political life. Because they found it exceptionally difficult to manipulate, the wealthy engaged in an enduring conspiracy against Greek democracy, toppling it several times – frequently with the assistance of foreign invasions – and occasionally massacring its leaders. When, after more than two hundred years, Athenian democracy was finally defeated for good the most dramatic effect, writes one noted scholar, “was the removal from the poor ... of all protection against exploitation and oppression by the powerful.”¹¹

Capitalism and the Dilution of Democracy

Although we use the term “democracy” to describe western political systems today, what we are in fact doing, as Wood points out, is conflating democracy with liberalism. In modern society, the rights of the individual – particularly rights to the private ownership of the means of producing social wealth – have become the ultimate touchstone of a “democratic society.” In practice, this involves the protection of wealthy individuals against the majority. Rather than resting on the power of the people, therefore, liberal democracy is founded on a radical attempt to curtail the rights of the *demos*.

The liberal transformation in the meaning of democracy began with the rise of capitalism, when private property rights became the new religion. Prior to capitalism, as we have seen, individuals did not have absolute rights to property. The feudal lord held land and the right to exploit peasants only as a trust acquired in exchange for a pledge of military, economic and political services to the monarch. Property rights were enmeshed with political office and its duties – and could be revoked.

The rise of capitalism changed all this. As capitalists battled to protect their wealth from incursions by monarchs and governments, they sought to turn private property into something absolute and inviolable, guaranteed and protected by constitutions, and defined as sacred, like life itself.¹² This historical process involved a dramatic privatization of the elements of economic life: rather than part of the public realm, land-holdings in particular (including the former common lands) now became private goods. The economy was thus detached from politics and communal rights and obligations, redefined as a private sphere that ought to be protected from the public.¹³ Enormous areas of social life – relating to land, production, prices, profits, incomes and so on – were enclosed, fenced off from the public, demarcated by virtual “No Trespassing” signs known as property laws.

Still, wherever possible, capitalist elites resisted granting even the universal right to vote. Two hundred years after the English Revolution of the 1640s, for instance, British working men were still denied the vote – a denial which in part spurred the Chartist movement of that period. As late as 1860, for instance, of 27.5 million inhabitants of the United Kingdom, only one million had the vote. In the 1866 debates that led to the formation of Canada, the soon-to-be first prime minister of the country bluntly outlined the view of Canada’s ruling class. Summarizing the positions taken in a conference on creating a Canadian state, he reported, “not a single one of the representatives ... was in favour of universal suffrage. Everyone felt that in this respect the principle of the British constitution should be carried out, and that classes and property

should be represented as well as numbers.”¹⁴ As in Britain, ownership of an “appropriate” amount of property was made a requirement of possessing the vote and a non-elected upper house based on wealth was created – all in order that “classes and property should be represented” as a buttress against the *demos*.

After hundreds of years of conflict, capitalist classes finally relented (in most cases somewhere between about 1890 and 1940) and allowed the vote to be extended to the poor – first men, then women. But they did so secure in the knowledge that, however much they didn’t like the involvement of the rabble in politics, at least the *demos* couldn’t take their property from them, sheltered as it now was behind a barricade of laws that declared it off limits to all but its private owners. The poor could be reluctantly admitted to political life, in other words, once democracy was prohibited from interfering with private economic power. This is the secret of capitalist “democracy”: it involves a dramatic contraction in the public sphere and the range of public powers. Major questions related to the distribution of property, the ownership of resources, and the allocation of wealth are now defined as issues of private economic life, best left to the market (where private individuals pursue their self-interest, free of public interference). With the “expulsion of politics” from these spheres, the ambit of democracy has been radically reduced. More than this, democracy has been emptied of its original content – which referred to the absolute sovereignty of the people – and refilled with liberal doctrines of individual (property-based) rights.

Two dramatic shifts in the meaning of democracy are associated with its dilution by capitalism. First, the notion of an actively self-governing people (who make the laws according to which they live) is replaced by the passive doctrine of representation. In the representative system, which was largely an innovation of American elites after the Revolution of 1776, people are entitled merely to vote occasionally for those who will make the laws – at the same time surrendering all control over the representatives they elect. Between elections, these representatives assume virtually

total power over the ostensibly sovereign people. Representative democracy is thus based upon the ideal of a de-mobilized and de-politicized *demos* who, because they are not governing themselves, become detached and alienated from the political process. In tune with this arrangement, capitalists construct well-funded political parties with enormous advertising budgets in order to dominate and manipulate public discourse about politics (which is greatly assisted by the fact that the mass media are owned by a handful of capitalist monopolies).

Secondly, the “expulsion of politics” from the economic sphere, as part of the privatization of economic power, means that some of the most important events in peoples’ lives – the closing of a factory, difficulties paying the rent, the decline of working class living standards, the lack of affordable housing and so on – are treated as problems of the market and thus outside the purview of politics. This further contributes to the passivity and disengagement of large numbers of people who frequently relate to politics as an obscure and distasteful business utterly remote to their everyday lives. Detached from the issues of daily life, democracy becomes something purely formal – occasional votes in elections dominated by money and influence – lacking any substance as a means by which the people might govern themselves. The “contraction of democracy to liberalism,” as Wood describes it, represents its domestication, its containment by capitalist property rights that prevent the people from affecting the real sources of power (and suffering) in society.¹⁵ Capitalism has thus de-clawed democracy, reducing it to a largely formal process, so that the powerful can get on with the real business of enriching themselves at the expense of the majority.

Nevertheless, radical social movements – particularly anti-globalization movements in Latin America at the moment – regularly challenge these limits to democracy. When protesters refuse to accept that issues like health care, jobs, provision of water, access to education and housing should be left to private actors in the market (and their global representatives, like the IMF and

the World Bank), they are implicitly challenging the privatization of economic power that lies at the heart of capitalism. These movements rightly suggest that it is anti-democratic for powerful private interests to dictate what happens to the quality of life of millions of people. Often without realizing it, these critics mobilize an older meaning of democracy as rule of the oppressed majority against the capitalist reduction of democracy to liberal individualism (the right of each individual to vote, to participate in the market economy and to have her property protected).

Implicitly, then, these struggles for radical democracy are anti-capitalist. By calling for the people – which in modern society ultimately means the working class, urban and rural – to have control over economic and social policy, they raise a challenge to the sanctity of capitalist property; they suggest that the overall direction of socio-economic life and the distribution of wealth and resources ought to be freely determined by the people as a whole, not monopolized by those who have property and power.

The ruling class recognizes this. That’s why, despite the lip service they pay to it, they’ve always been squeamish about democracy. Toward the end of the last major period of social and political upheaval – the mass strikes, civil rights struggles, anti-war mobilizations, feminist and gay liberation upsurges of the late 1960s and early 1970s – a ruling class consortium known as the Trilateral Commission argued that modern society suffered from “an excess of democracy.”¹⁶ It meant two things by this. First, that people were mobilizing for themselves to change society (not passively leaving things to elected representatives). And in the course of doing so they were challenging the capitalist monopoly over economic decision-making. The claim that society suffers from “too much democracy,” in other words, really means that the *demos* are starting to interfere with the business of controlling property and structures of power, and appropriating profit.

Recognizing that during the 1980s and 1990s they had rolled back many of the gains of the previous period of struggle, the ruling class now wants both to extend and lock in the gains it has

made. This is why the WTO agreements create mechanisms by which private corporations can punish governments that give in to public pressure to reverse privatization, defend public services and so on. It is also why more and more of the global commons – seeds, water, life-forms, human DNA and so on – are being commodified: once they enter the private sphere, they are protected by a vast array of incredibly punitive laws against violators. At the heart of these “trade” agreements, in other words, are laws designed to prevent the people of any nation from democratically making inroads against the immense and unaccountable powers of capital.

In fact, the globalizers are trying to design an “economic” model that is immune to democratic politics. Neoliberal cheerleader Thomas Friedman puts this bluntly when he describes contemporary economic orthodoxy as involving a “Golden Straitjacket.” Once a country cuts taxes and social spending and sets out to privatize and deregulate business and finance, its politics effectively die, he argues:

Two things tend to happen: your economy grows and your politics shrinks ... The Golden Straitjacket narrows the political and economic choices of those in power to relatively tight parameters. That is why it is increasingly difficult these days to find any real difference between ruling and opposition parties in those countries that have put on the Golden Straitjacket. Once your country puts on the Golden Straitjacket, its political choices get reduced to Pepsi or Coke – to slight nuances of policy ... but never any deviation from the core golden rules.¹⁷

For all these reasons, contemporary anti-globalization struggles raise the fundamental contradiction between (real) democracy and capitalism – and pose the need for anti-capitalist political movements.

Civil Society or Revolt from Below?

As we have seen, the global justice movement is far from agreed about anti-capitalism. While there are critics who simply want to give globalization “a human face,” there are also “those who champion the dispossessed,” aspiring “not to reform” capitalism “but to stop it.”¹⁸ This has given rise to talk of there being “two lefts” in the world at the moment – one responsible, pragmatic and parliamentarist; the other militant, radical and disruptive. The first seeks a place at the table of power alongside the elites; the other seeks to overturn that table and to build new kinds of popular power. As a recent article in *Newsweek* observed, “there are two different lefts” in Latin America today. While one accepts “an essentially orthodox macroeconomic framework” – i.e. neoliberalism – the other challenges it.¹⁹ The difference between these perspectives was for many years apparent at global justice protests, manifesting itself frequently as a clash between the cautious approaches of NGOs and labour leaders in the North and the more confrontational tactics of generally younger “direct action” militants and activists from the South, who organize street protests at trade meetings. In truth, the issue is much larger, transcending what happens at trade meetings, and going to the heart of how we achieve radical social change.

Forbes magazine, a major US business publication, broached this divergence within the global justice movement in several articles in its November 2000 issue. Criticizing the grassroots rebellions in India that pressured the country’s Supreme Court to order a halt to Monsanto’s field experiments with genetically-engineered cotton, which the magazine blamed for having “wrecked” Monsanto, *Forbes* lauded such NGOs as Oxfam International for their responsible and cooperative approach. In particular, the magazine commended the group’s British campaign manager’s claim that “Oxfam’s point of view isn’t that globalization is bad per se. We don’t want to get rid of the World Bank or IMF, because if you didn’t have them the situation would be a heck of a lot

worse." Operating as a polite, respectable opposition that "would rather duke it out in the conference room than on the streets," the writers pointed out, Oxfam was rewarded with an invitation to contribute to the World Bank's report on international development.²⁰

Rather than genuinely transforming policy, NGOs like Oxfam "are in fact helping the WTO out of its crisis of legitimacy," says labour researcher Gerard Greenfield.²¹ Having suffered huge public relations disasters, the World Bank and WTO have both undertaken major facelifts designed to give them friendly, more humane images. They care, really care, about poverty, they insist. In fact, the Bank's website now bears the slogan, "Our dream is a world free of poverty." Another prominent box on the web page intones, "Globalization must work for the poor." Slogans come cheap, however. What better way to change image than bringing the critics inside and letting them write policy papers and background documents? Sadly, many NGOs have been all too happy to help these agencies spruce up their appearance. Heavily reliant on donors, particularly governments, most NGOs crave a basic level of respectability in elite circles. Frequently, they are prepared to offer the globalizers a human face by entering a "dialogue" with them and taking some of their funds for charitable operations in the South.

To do so is to engage in a polite version of elite politics, meeting as representatives of "civil society" with world officials behind closed doors. The editors of the *Globe and Mail* captured the strategic choices confronting movements against neoliberalism in the following terms:

The social democrats of Europe and North America ... argue that globalization must be given a human face. Outside, in the streets of Seattle or Prague or Montreal ... are those who champion the dispossessed. They discern no benefit in capitalism's march across the continents. They seek not to reform it but to stop it.²²

And between the two strategies – elite accommodation or popular resistance – lie fundamental differences about how genuine social change is to be achieved.

Take the term "civil society," for instance. Many anti-globalization critics embrace it as a category for describing their movement.²³ Yet, the concept is fraught with difficulties. The idea of "civil society" emerged during the rise of capitalism in order to characterize the new spaces of bourgeois social life – the stock exchange, trade fair, coffeehouse, and university – that had developed as alternatives to the institutional space of the court, where monarch and aristocrats had traditionally mingled.²⁴ The sphere of civil society was constructed as a "polite" space of cultural refinement, commercial exchange, political organizing and intellectual discussion.²⁵ While the meaning of the term has shifted over time, it is difficult not to see its use today as an attempt to invite mainstream respectability, to avoid being seen as part of the rabble or mob.²⁶ Hoping to be admitted into the inner sanctums of elite discussion and negotiation, many NGO and labour leaderships have sought to prove their respectability by denouncing those who engage in less polite forms of protest. Oxfam's global advocacy director, for instance, condemned street protesters in Prague for their "brute force."²⁷ The use of the term "brute" is highly instructive, particularly for its contrast with "civil." After all, brutes are uncivilized, uncultured – and usually non-white. We, these reformers seem to suggest, are polite, educated, refined – in a word, civil.

Others are less concerned about civility when it comes to fighting for human rights and livelihoods. These people – who seize land for the poor, wage general strikes against structural adjustment, loot supermarkets in order to feed their children, build barricades to block giant dams, throw rocks at riot police trying to break up their demonstrations – will never be invited behind closed doors. Organizing movements of peasants, indigenous peoples, workers and the urban poor, their priority is the building

of militant mass organizations that serve as creative laboratories for popular strategies and tactics.

Writing about the Latin American left, and echoing *Newsweek*, but from a considerably more congenial political outlook, James Petras perceptively observes that "To talk about 'the Left' ... is misleading because there is more than one, and the older sort remains, like a withering vine, blocking from view the emergence of the new socio-political movements."²⁸ This observation should be extended beyond the confines of a single continent. Across the international Left today there is a global parting of the ways, particularly in the South, where increasingly militant protests and rebellions against neoliberalism pursue a radically different strategy from the reform-minded lobbying efforts of mainstream NGOs and bureaucratic labour leaders. The divisions that have come into focus during the protests at world trade meetings in fact reflect wider and more enduring strategic differences between an institutionalized left and insurgent socio-political movements.

Because these radical struggles are waged from below, by masses of peasants, workers and marginalized people, and because they are largely fought out in the South, they rarely register on the radar screens in the North. They ought to, however, for they embody the dream of a better world.

Struggles over Land in India: Fighting the New Colonialism

The December 31, 2001 issue of *Outlook India*, a major news-magazine, presented an interesting study in contrasts. A feature story under the heading "The New Left" documents a stunning transformation in the Left Front, which governs Bengal. The author reports that under the Left Front, "illegal encroachers have been cleared from the Tolly's nullah (canal) area, while squatters have been evicted from at least four government hospitals and suburban railway tracks." The Front's chairman tells the reporter, "Restraint and consolidation are as important, if not more so, as

militancy," while its chief minister pronounces, "We will not tolerate labour indiscipline or violence."²⁹

Elsewhere in the same issue is a heart-breaking story about the town of Tehri in the state of Uttaranchal. The two hundred-year-old town is slowly being drowned by rising river waters caused by construction of one of the world's highest dams. The struggle against the Tehri dam was more than three decades old at the time. It was also on its last legs, as the last families were fleeing the rising waters. Gazing on the glistening water around him, the town's crusading environmentalist remarks, "This is our water, being used to kill us, then being looted to grow cane in Meerut and flush Delhi's toilets."³⁰

Throughout large parts of India, similar battles are being fought, especially in villages and towns along the banks of the giant River Narmada which slices across the middle of the country. Of the more than four thousand large dams in India, three-quarters of them are found in the three large states across which the Narmada cuts. Perhaps fifty million people have been displaced by giant dams in the last half-century. That's three times the population of Australia brutally dispossessed. And of these displaced people, 40 per cent are *adivasis*, indigenous tribal peoples. Across India, at least half of those displaced by large "development" projects are pauperized. Not surprisingly, in recent years, huge numbers of these people have been fighting back, many of them organized by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement - NBA).³¹

Largely marginalized by the political establishment, people facing displacement have resorted to direct actions both desperate and powerfully effective. Since the late 1980s, the NBA has organized sit-ins, court challenges, marches, fasts and occupations in efforts to halt dam construction at Sardar Sarovar, Mashewar, Maan and many other locations. In the case of the Mashewar dam, where sixty-one villages face full or partial submersion, thousands of local people have rallied in the face of baton-wielding riot police and the arrests of hundreds of activists. The women

of the area have been in the forefront of the resistance, taking shifts lying on the access roads for months on end in order to block the arrival of construction materials. Against enormous odds – including the typical denunciations of the poor for using “violence and subterfuge” in the face of the destructive projects of capital – a growing movement has been built which has thrown up considerable obstacles to the mania for giant dams, forcing the World Bank to withdraw from at least one major project.³²

The NBA has also played an important role in the development of grassroots movements against globalization. On November 30, 1999, the Global Day of Resistance against Capitalism and the WTO, the Joint Action Forum of Indian People Against the WTO and Anti-Human Policies, and the All-India Peoples’ Resistance Forum organized a series of large protests in various parts of India. Among these actions was the launch of a 3,000-kilometer march of indigenous peoples through 1,500 villages – organized as a wave of rolling land occupations to demand land reform. Also on the Global Day of Resistance, thousands of farmers rallied in Bangalore to issue a notice to Monsanto to “Quit India” or face a campaign of direct action against its installations, the very campaign that *Forbes* magazine blames for “wrecking” the company. Some days earlier, as part of the build-up to November 30, more than three hundred *adavisis* jumped over the fence of the World Bank building in Delhi, blockading it and covering it with posters, graffiti, cow dung and mud. In a poignant open letter to the president of the World Bank, the tribal peoples proclaimed their unending opposition to the new imperialism. Fingering the Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project funded by the Bank, they declared,

For the World Bank and the WTO, our forests are a marketable commodity. But for us, the forests are a home, our source of livelihood, the dwelling of our gods, the burial grounds of our ancestors, the inspiration of our culture ... We will not let you sell our forests.

Notwithstanding the incredible courage and persistence it has displayed, the movement is up against extreme difficulties. In early 2006, India’s Supreme Court effectively approved plans to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam in the Narmada Valley – plans which will see an additional 220 villages flooded and 35,000 families forced to flee. As novelist Arundhati Roy writes in *The Greater Common Good*, the majority of these people will be “eventually absorbed into slums on the periphery of our great cities, where it coalesces into an immense pool of cheap construction labour.” This is the inevitable result, she continues, of a ruling class that uses the state to appropriate India’s resources, “its land its water, its forests, its fish, its meat, its eggs, its air” for the benefit of “a favoured few.” Not surprisingly, the indigenous peoples of the Narmada Valley see in this sort of postcolonial capitalism a continuity with colonialism. And they pledge to continue their struggle against all such forms of domination:

The Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project and other such projects only intensify the colonial takeover of our forests that began with British rule in our country. We fought the British and we will fight the new form of colonialism that you represent with all our strength.³³

“The Occupation is the Movement”: Revolt of the Landless in Latin America

Halfway around the world from India, a struggle against a giant dam played a major role in the emergence of the most powerful and dynamic rural workers movement in the world: Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement (MST). At the very end of the 1970s, some 10,000 families were displaced from their land along the Parana River to make way for a giant hydroelectric dam. A few years later, the region became the site of a land occupation movement that figured centrally in the emergence of the MST.

It has rightly been observed that one of the most significant aspects of the growth of radical movements in Latin America is

the emergence of struggles in the countryside as a "stronghold for the resurgence of the Left."³⁴ And this is the case not only in Brazil.

In Bolivia, for instance, rural movements took the forefront after the tin miners' union, long the vanguard of the left, was decimated by an IMF/World Bank restructuring in the mid-1980s, during which 50,000 miners were fired. Having returned to the land in order to survive, tens of thousands of these miners now play active roles in radical peasant movements, particularly as *cocaleros* (coca growers), imbuing these movements with a unique anti-capitalist consciousness. Their struggles converge with those of highly organized indigenous peoples who constitute at least two-thirds of Bolivia's population.

So effective have these peasant and indigenous movements become that, during the year 2000, two major indigenous rebellions shook the Bolivian government. In the second of these revolts, the Aymara people blocked seventy main roads for weeks, paralyzing much of the economy, until the government gave in to their demands for control over their land and water, and better pay for teachers.³⁵ The Aymara campaigns draw upon an old myth of "war of the six stones:" native peoples fill the roads with thousands of stones, making them impassable. After the army has cleared them, the roads are refilled.³⁶ These tactics, involving coordinated action among thousands of people, have opened up new spaces of militant resistance. As we shall see below, in recent years major struggles in Bolivia – particularly the "Water Wars" and the "Gas Wars" – involving semi-insurrectionary upheavals of indigenous peoples, urban workers, and rural labourers have posed some of the world's most powerful challenges to neoliberalism.

But it is the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil which has built the most powerful and mass organization of rural workers, though one which has not yet had the political impact of the mass upheavals in Bolivia. With a membership of one million, the MST is challenging the most unequal pattern of land owner-

ship on the continent, where just over 1 per cent of the country's landowners possess nearly half the land. In addition, struggles for land have been met with extraordinary brutality from wealthy landowners and the army: according to the Pastoral Land Commission of the Catholic Church, at least 1,684 rural workers were assassinated between 1964 and 1991.³⁷ MST activists have also been regularly murdered by soldiers and military police.

Formed in 1984, the MST has spearheaded a massive challenge to Brazil's ruling class. The organization has initiated more than 1200 land occupations, expropriating more than 50,000 square kilometres of land and settling over 100,000 families on them.³⁸ And from occupation, the movement moves to production and community building: "Occupy, Resist, Produce" is one of its prominent slogans. Equally significant as its methods of struggle – highway blockades, land invasions and sit-ins at the Agrarian Reform Institutes (responsible for government land reform) – are the MST's forms of organization. Rather than simply promote individual proprietorship of the land, it fosters rural cooperatives of agricultural producers and has developed cooperatively owned factories for meat storage, milk packing and coffee roasting. Once land is occupied, an MST encampment is set up and organized democratically. Decisions are made collectively with a general assembly constituting the highest decision-making body. The movement also carries on important work of public education: it has established 1,200 schools and operates thirty radio stations. Finding that mainstream teachers are not adequate to the task of building a culture of liberation, the MST has developed its own teacher training programs. "We have three fences to cut down," explains one of the movement's organizers: "the fence of the big estate, the fence of ignorance and the fence of capital."³⁹ In short, rather than just win land, the Landless Workers Movement aims at a radical social transformation. "Our struggle is not only to win the land," explains another organizer. "We are building a new way of life."⁴⁰

As part of this campaign for a new way of life, the movement has struggled to address gender inequalities and to promote women into activist leadership roles. It urges its communities to elect equal numbers of women at all levels, and in 2000 half of the leaders chosen for the national leadership were indeed female. And in an effort to cultivate internationalism, the MST organizes across national borders, linking with peasant movements in Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay. The movement has also built links with radical labour in the urban centers, and it has begun to innovate in developing sustainable and organic agriculture.⁴¹

Of course, like all real mass social movements, the MST struggles with the pressures of the existing social order. As much as it positions itself against capitalism, its members are also forced to operate within the framework of a market society. Yet, to its credit, MST practices, education and forms of organization remain powerfully radical. In addition to promoting internationalism, cooperativism and democracy, the MST stresses direct action as the key method for developing militancy and class consciousness. Not only are land occupations effective, they are uniquely empowering and politicizing. "Rural workers learn more on the day of the occupation than during a whole lifetime," claims one activist. Another movement coordinator elaborates:

The occupation has a symbolic significance for the landless. It is an action that opens a space for political socialization, for struggle and resistance. This space, built by the workers, is the place of experience and training for the movement. The occupation is the movement.⁴²

This emphasis on direct action has had a galvanizing effect on labour and student radicals in the cities, helping to counter trends toward a passive, electoral approach, which has become dominant in the Workers Party (PT), whose leaders have, as we shall see, abandoned radicalism for accommodation with capitalism. By stressing militancy, resistance, direct action and anti-capitalism, the MST has played a crucial role in fostering mili-

tancy within important sections of the working class movement in Brazil. In fact, the MST has inspired a movement of urban homeless people that models itself on its direct action strategy. In all these ways, the MST has demonstrated the importance of alliances among the poor and the oppressed in both rural and urban settings.

Building Solidarity: Dilemmas of Resistance in Chiapas

The difficulties confronting the heroic struggles in Chiapas underline the strategic importance of building a movement that links together the rural and urban working classes. These issues were thrown into sharp relief for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) shortly after its January 1994 uprising. As commentators have noted, the EZLN offensive was anything but a military success – the movement was quickly forced to abandon all its captured territory – but it was an unexpected political coup. The Zapatista rebellion struck a chord of sympathy across wide sections of the Mexican population. A ferocious response from the Mexican army was halted in large part by an outpouring of solidarity from workers, peasants and students throughout the country.

As the army unleashed its terror in the immediate aftermath of January 1, 1994, more than seventy Zapatistas and up to 275 civilians were killed (along with thirteen government soldiers). The government was thrown into reverse, however, by the hundreds of thousands of ordinary Mexicans who took to the streets to support the Zapatistas' demands and oppose the army's murderous response. Then, when EZLN representatives arrived in San Cristobal in February 1994 for negotiations with the government, tens of thousands of cheering people turned out, forming a "peace cordon" to protect them. The effect was electrifying, not least on the Zapatistas themselves. As EZLN Subcommandante Marcos told interviewers,

... that absurd and marvelous "cordon of peace" ... took us completely by surprise. Remember, when we'd left San Cristobal [after seizing it on January 1] we were going to our death; we were sure we were going to get killed somewhere along the way. Then, see, we came back to San Cristobal and people were waiting for us, applauding us, jostling each other to see us. They'd even organized themselves to make that cordon in the cold, under the rain. People of no party or organization, who weren't obeying any orders, any line, who got no advantage from being there. They were hungry, taking risks, getting photographed there, they could lose their job. All that just because they believed in it. It was our first contact with them; we didn't expect this encounter.⁴³

The response of militant workers' organizations in the cities was particularly inspiring: within twelve days of the initial uprising, mass meetings of power workers, teachers, auto workers, health care workers and others demanded an end to the government offensive. Over the course of several days, hundreds of thousands of workers mobilized in the streets in solidarity with the EZLN. So powerful were the expressions of support that in Puruaran, Michoacan, sugar mill workers voted to unite with the Zapatistas.⁴⁴ Sensing that its future hinged significantly on alliances with movements outside the indigenous communities of Chiapas, the EZLN high command began developing a wider political strategy. In June 1994, it floated a proposal for a National Democratic Convention. By January of the next year, it was calling for the construction of a Movement for National Liberation as a means of moving beyond the military struggle against the Mexican state. A year later, Marcos urged the formation of a Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN) in addition to the Zapatista Army. At the same time, the EZLN also developed its worldwide connections by sponsoring two International Encounters for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism.⁴⁵

As Marcos acknowledges, the Zapatista leadership was "improvising," searching for a political strategy that could break their isolation by building a national political front for "liberty, democracy and justice." Thus far, for all of its inspiring militancy, the Zapatistas have not succeeded in galvanizing a substantial organized movement, despite the massive sympathy in Mexican society for their cause – manifest also in the hundreds of thousands of cheering people who greeted them in Mexico City in September 1997.⁴⁶ Given the absence of a powerful, unified movement, the government has been able to launch repeated military attacks. A brutal campaign beginning in December 1997 saw forty-five native people slaughtered in Acteal, eight in El Bosque and eleven in El Charco – all Zapatista communities.⁴⁷ Tens of thousands of Mexican troops continue to operate in Chiapas, periodically arresting, raping and killing suspected Zapatista rebels.

Then, in a blatant betrayal, the Mexican Congress voted in the spring of 2001 to gut the Indian Rights bill agreed to by the previous government in negotiations with the EZLN. By removing key sections of the bill that would have granted autonomy to Mexico's fifty-seven distinct indigenous peoples, the Congress proposed legislation that has been overwhelmingly rejected by both the Zapatistas and the National Indigenous Congress.⁴⁸

In 2006, the Zapatista leadership launched "The Other Campaign," timed to coincide with Mexico's presidential elections. The campaign involved a nationwide tour designed to unite left-wing groups into an anti-capitalist alliance. Subcommandante Marcos declared of the campaign, "Together, we're going to shake up this country from below, lift it up, and stand it on its head." However commendable these sentiments, The Other Campaign failed to generate a meaningful mass movement, underlining the need for the EZLN to find ways to engage in long term alliance building, rather than one-shot campaigns.

The Zapatista movement is thus at something of a crossroads. Twelve years of mobilization and periodic negotiations with government have yet to produce meaningful gains. In the face of

military repression and its own uncertainties, the EZLN continues to search for a political strategy that might mobilize "Indians, peasants, laborers, housewives, people in the shantytowns, union members, students, teachers" and others in a common struggle.⁴⁹

Popular Revolts and General Strikes: Ecuador, Puerto Rico and Bolivia

The most significant anti-neoliberal successes in Latin America have come from popular uprisings involving the mobilization of common fronts of peasants, indigenous peoples and workers in united struggle. Young women are playing an increasingly prominent role as leaders of these movements and indigenous activists are often the principal spokespeople.⁵⁰ Frequently assuming near-insurrectionary proportions, these movements are light years away from the tame and gradualist approach of the reformist left. A particularly dramatic example occurred in Ecuador in January 2001, when indigenous movements and radical soldiers briefly seized control of the government.

Since 1997, Ecuador has been staggering through a deepening economic and social crisis. Popular resistance blocked government efforts to implement a harsh neoliberal program: two such attempts were defeated in 1999 by massive social protest. As the economic crisis worsened that year – with 150,000 people losing their jobs and the price of water jumping 400 per cent – the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE) and the Coordination of Social Movements (CMS) demanded the government's resignation. However, in January 2000, the government managed to unite most sections of big business behind it. It won bourgeois support for "dollarization" of the economy (tying the economy to the US dollar) and began to repress the popular movements – occupying the universities, arresting worker and peasant leaders, sending the army into indigenous communities.

At this point, an indigenous-led uprising shattered the government. Roads and highways were blocked and native peoples

surrounded the Congress, drawing out tens of thousands of supporters who took to the streets across the country. On January 21, the leader of the CONAIE joined with radical soldiers to seize the Congress and proclaim a new government. Uncertain as to how to proceed, however, and lacking sufficient support from urban labour movements, the insurrectionists were outmaneuvered by the ruling class.⁵¹

Still, the popular movement in Ecuador won important gains. In February 2001, a new wave of social mobilization involving indigenous peoples, trade unionists and students blocked roads, organized strikes, occupied universities and confronted police.⁵² As a result, the government has been forced to abandon plans for dollarization of the economy and to reject involvement in Washington's Plan Colombia. Then, in April 2005, another popular upheaval – in which 30,000 people battled riot police throughout the night and 1000,000 descended on the presidential palace the next day – ousted president Lucio Guterrez from office over his neoliberal and anti-democratic policies. A year later, indigenous protests against moves toward a Free Trade agreement with the US (coming at the same time as strikes and protests in the oil regions of the Amazon) threw Guterrez's successor into crisis.

But if urban labour movements have been passive and timid in Ecuador, this is not everywhere the case. During the summer of 1998, for instance, hundreds of thousands of workers in Puerto Rico struck against privatization of the US colony's telephone service. The struggle began with a walkout by phone workers on June 18. When riot police were mobilized to beat the strikers – images of which filled TV news broadcasts – thousands of workers and students poured out to bolster picket lines. Electrical, water and transport workers quickly joined the strike.

Then, on June 28, more than 5,000 delegates from unions and community organizations attended an assembly of the Greater Committee of Labour Organizations, comprising unions and student, environmental and community groups, and voted in favour of a nationwide general strike. For two days in early July,

200,000 workers struck against privatization, closing the international airport, the banks, government offices and all campuses of the university – and dramatically reviving a labour movement that had for years been dormant.⁵³

The mass strike in Puerto Rico provided a glimpse of a new form of radical labour organizing. Rather than operate according to sector and occupation – as teachers, telephone workers, or transport workers – the Greater Committee of Labour Organizations put the principle of working class solidarity to the fore. It brought activists from women's, student and environmental groups into its assemblies, thereby launching an action that was widely referred to as *La huelga del pueblo* – the people's strike. This approach has been most successfully developed in Bolivia, which has seen one of the most extraordinary uprisings against neoliberalism.

Bolivia is an especially important case because, as the *Financial Times* notes, "the World Bank and the IMF saw [it] as something of a model."⁵⁴ The country's government adopted the IMF/World Bank mania for privatization, selling off electrical utilities, the airline and the national train service. Then, in 1999, it added the water system in Bolivia's second largest city, Cochabamba, to its sell-off list. Soon it found a buyer, a newly formed subsidiary of the San Francisco-based Bechtel Enterprises. So sweet was the Bechtel deal that the lease gave the company control of Cochabamba's water for forty years, guaranteeing it an average rate of return of 16 per cent, and ensuring that its contract would override all future changes to Bolivian law. Immediately after the contract was signed in January, residents of Cochabamba were hit with water rate hikes of 100 per cent or more.⁵⁵

So overwhelming was the public uproar that a mid-January general strike paralyzed the city for four days. A new mass coalition known as *La Coordinadora* emerged to coordinate the struggle against water privatization. On February 4, an awesome display of people's power erupted in strikes and street protests. Two Bolivian journalists recount the events:

The first cordons of police who try to block the bridges leading to the town center are broken through around 10 a.m. The multitude who reach the main square don't let the forces of order stop them, despite the gas and the bullets, the blows and truncheons.

The resolute pressure of the crowd, fired by the justice of its demands, throws back the police ... The entire rest of the town is now in the hands of the people. A great spirit of solidarity arises, fear conquered, hesitations swept away ...

The people of Cochabamba have recovered their dignity, unleashed their anger, constructed a new solidarity, bearer of hope, victory and elation.

On February 5th, Cochabamba woke in total uncertainty ... Again the streets fill up, the crossroads are blocked and the crowd returns to occupy the central square. Solidarity is organized. The doors open to welcome the wounded; fires are lit at the crossroads; people talk, organize, share vinegar to counter the effects of the gas; entire families fill the street; parents want their children to learn how to defend a just demand; canteens are improvised to feed the demonstrators.

The entire population joins the mobilization.⁵⁶

These protests involved a vast coalition of popular forces: peasant organizations and indigenous movements figured centrally. But so did the Federation of Workers of Cochabamba, led by Oscar Olivera, who grasps something which has typically eluded Bolivia's national labour movement (the COB): that the old style of workplace-centered organization is inadequate to the tasks of the moment. So, the workers' movement of Cochabamba spearheads *La Coordinadora*, building a movement "where the peasant is as welcome as the worker trades unionist, the inhabitant of a popular neighbourhood, the organizer of an association of cultivators, the 'young activist' or again the citizen who feels concerned."⁵⁷

The "water war" becomes a radical popular movement, mobilizing all the exploited and oppressed. Five times a week, citywide assemblies are held with crowds ranging from 5,000 to 100,000. Ancient democracy – a participatory democracy based on rule of the poor – is reborn without exclusions in the streets of Cochabamba. Here, in the mass assemblies, all the decisions are made, decisions to which the movement's leaders are fully accountable. "These people," note two observers, "wish to represent and rule themselves. They block the streets, bar the roads, go to the square with their children, armed with batons and slings, debate in assemblies and then carry out the decisions taken."⁵⁸

Having set April 4 as the date by which the government must cancel the Bechtel contract, the workers organize a general strike and the people again fill the city square. On April 8, the government hits back, declaring a state of emergency and arresting Olivera and other leaders of the movement (all of whom are flown to a remote jail in the jungle). Five protesters are shot dead in the streets. Still, the people do not waver. On April 10, with the general strike entering its seventh day, the popular uprising intensifies. Highway blockades are extended, thousands of people jam the central square, women go door-to-door collecting food for the street protesters. As evening falls, the news breaks: the government has canceled the water contract.

This momentous victory represented more than the defeat of a privatization policy and a consortium of multinational corporations. More importantly, it represented the emergence of a new form of popular power. For one week, writes Oscar Olivera, the insurgent forces of the poor and the oppressed

briefly replaced... the state itself with a new type of popular government based on assemblies and town meetings held at the regional and state levels. For one week, the state had been demolished. In its place stood the self-government of the poor based on their local and regional organizational structures.⁵⁹

But this inspiring form of popular power could not be sustained in merely one city or region. Recognizing that a battle has been won but that the struggle continues, Oscar Olivera boards a flight to Washington to join protests against the World Bank and IMF. He and his Bolivian comrades are denounced by World Bank President James Wolfensohn as "rioters." It is a label they wear with pride.

From Water Wars to Gas Wars: Bolivia's Cycle of Revolt

Even if popular power in a single town could not replace the old order, Cochabamba's water wars set off a cycle of revolt that, six years later, is far from over. Overlapping with the struggles over water, the month of August, 2001 saw mass actions of indigenous peoples over land and social security – in a country in which two-thirds of the population identify themselves as aboriginal. A year later, the hugely popular Coca Wars broke out, as coca growers, many of them former tin miners, staged potent protests. Fuelled by the energy of these struggles, Evo Morales, representing the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), received 21 per cent of the vote in the presidential elections that year, just one per cent shy of the winning candidate. Even larger upheavals were yet to come.

In 2003 the largest protests in Bolivian history erupted, products of an intersecting set of revolts. Widespread road blockades early in the year signaled that the Coca Wars were far from over. Anti-IMF protests in February saw huge crowds torch City Hall, the Customs Office and a Coca Cola plant in El Alto, the capital city. Then, in October, the Gas Wars took center stage, in a momentous campaign to de-privatize natural gas and oil and return them to public ownership. When half a million people descended from the *altiplano* (the huge, mountain-side neighbourhoods of the poor above La Paz) in one of the largest mass actions in Latin American history, it was clear that the presidency of Sanchez de Lozada (Goni) was at an end.

Yet, while Goni's resignation represented a major victory, the insurgent movement did not confuse defeat of a president with defeat of neoliberalism. The Gas Wars continued throughout 2004, and the demand for public ownership grew into an ear-shattering roar. Then, in early 2005, the Second Water Wars broke out, this time against privatization of the water and sewer system in El Alto. A general strike called by the neighbourhood movement (FEJUVE- El Alto) paralyzed the capital city and soon spread to other parts of the country. Road blocks and barricades paralyzed the economy. Extraordinarily large and militant actions culminated in early June when, again, up to half a million protestors took over El Alto. Once again, the mass movement toppled a president – this time Carlos Mesa. Before the year was out, Evo Morales and the Movement Toward Socialism would win the general elections.⁶⁰

After Mesa's resignation, one major newspaper observed,

Life is growing ever more precarious for elected South American leaders who advocate market liberalization, privatization and other measures ... Bolivia's Carlos Mesa is the latest victim of a populist uprising. . .

Mr. Mesa joins seven other presidents across the continent who have hastily departed office in recent years without being able to finish their terms.

And the editors knew who to blame: "a politicized indigent population led by militant leftists and supported by coca growers who are angry about U.S. intervention... The protesters have taken to the streets, occupied plants, blockaded highways and threatened to cut off gas shipments."⁶¹

Of course, many problems remain. As we shall see below, popular forces in Bolivia now confront a crucial tension: between reliance on mass self-activity and self-organization to change society, on the one hand, and reliance on electoral politics on the other. It is a situation fraught with dangers. But for the moment, popular movements in Bolivia have driven a huge hole through

the heart of neoliberalism in Latin America. And they have given enormous inspiration to popular movements throughout the region. Nowhere is this more true, perhaps, than in Venezuela.

Venezuela and the "Socialism of the 21st Century"

It is widely recognized today that Venezuela is in the midst of hugely important social struggles. Too many commentators, however, focus excessively on the country's fiery president, Hugo Chavez. To be sure, Chavez is a key part of the story. However, the "Bolivarian Revolution" underway in Venezuela (which derives its name from the great 19th century liberator, Simon Bolivar, who defeated colonial armies in a bid to unify South America on democratic lines) is a much larger story, one with roots that predate the December 1998 election of Chavez to the presidency.

In an important sense, 1989 stands out as a crucial year. It was then that the Venezuelan government adopted wholesale an IMF program that dismantled social welfare, price subsidies and wage regulations. With poverty levels already soaring, these cuts were certain to spark opposition. The moment of contestation came, following hikes in gas prices and public transit fares, when university students occupied a bus terminal and quickly attracted the support of workers and street vendors. Highway blockages and looting of food trucks and stores soon followed. As the insurgency rolled into its third day, Venezuela's rulers turned to violence. The army invaded working class districts, shooting hundreds. The final death toll may have topped one thousand.

While repression had stopped the revolt, it only further angered and alienated the poor. And it did not stop radical organizing in the poor communities, or *barrios*. Similar discontent affected rank and file soldiers, some of whom backed a failed coup attempt by the then-unknown Hugo Chavez, an army officer. In the presidential elections the next year, support for the mainstream parties

collapsed. Seething popular anger and a crisis of the ruling parties set the stage for Chavez's election in late 1998.

At first, Chavez governed cautiously. He disavowed socialism and courted business support. At the same time, he promoted a new constitution of a left-populist flavour and promised to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Still, his radicalism often seemed more verbal than substantive. Then a series of attacks from the right were met by popular mobilizations that saved Chavez's presidency. And the Bolivarian Revolution tilted decidedly to the left.

The first attack came in the form of a military coup, backed by the US government, in April 2002. The plotters seized Chavez and transported him to an offshore military base. One hundred of his supporters were also arrested. Then the people of the *barrios* went into motion. Sending out the call by word of mouth and community radio stations, thousands poured down the hills above Caracas to surround the presidential palace and demand that Chavez be returned. At the same time, discontent shook the army, as rank and file soldiers, hostile to Venezuela's elites, began declaring their loyalty to Chavez. In the face of this mounting opposition, the coup collapsed and Chavez was restored to the presidency. Emboldened, working class organizations began to press Chavez to proceed more radically.

Seven months later, in December 2002, the right moved again. This time, the privileged management of the state oil company, PDVSA, hostile to Chavez's efforts to increase government control over the company and over oil revenues, called a "strike" (really a management lockout) designed to deprive the government of oil taxes. As anti-Chavez forces took to the streets to demand that the president resign, popular movements again struck back, out-organizing and out-mobilizing the forces of the Right. Unable to win the battle in the streets, the anti-Chavez forces retreated. Once again, movements of the oppressed had defeated the elites.

The third effort to displace Chavez came with a recall referendum held in August 2004. The right had agitated for the refer-

endum, calling on Venezuelans to vote for recall of Chavez. But neighbourhood organizations, progressive unions and left-wing parties again seized the initiative. Mobilizing in workplaces and *barrios*, they produced the largest vote in Venezuela's history. With 70 per cent of eligible voters turning out, fully 58 per cent voted to back Chavez. For the third time, popular movements had saved the leftist president and inflicted a crippling blow on the elites.⁶²

In the course of all these events, Hugo Chavez has shifted to the left. Understanding that Venezuela's ruling class will oppose all moves to tackle poverty and social inequality, he has pushed forward his reform program. In recent years, Chavez has moved more decisively to establish public control of the oil industry; he has launched important new social programs, particularly in the areas of health and education; he has more aggressively opposed the economic and military policies of Washington. Equally significant, he has come to define the Bolivarian Revolution as a socialist one.

The term he uses here is "the socialism of the 21st century," to indicate that Venezuela's socialist project does not adhere to any earlier models. While there is much to applaud here – particularly the idea that there are socialisms radically different from the bureaucratic and authoritarian models that dominated Eastern Europe and China – there are also many ambiguities. In particular, Chavez and his supporters rarely have clear answers to questions concerning radical democracy, social ownership and self-management.

In Chapter Seven, I will take up these issues at greater length. But, in essence, what is at stake here is whether this socialist perspective envisages new forms of popular power in which the exploited masses uproot the old structures of power and establish democratic control of economic and political life through grassroots institutions based in neighbourhoods and places of work. For that to occur, new forms of popular power must be developed as a central part of the revolutionary project. Thus far, the record in Venezuela is highly uneven.

Certainly there have been moves to create new mass organizations in Venezuela in recent years. Both "Bolivarian Circles" and "Patriotic Circles" have been launched. Yet, the initiative to create these circles has largely come from above, as efforts to institutionalize support for President Chavez. A revolution that aspires to completely remake the social order, however, needs forms of mass popular self-organization, spaces in which the oppressed begin to take control of more and more aspects of their own lives as part of establishing a participatory democracy and forms of *self-government*. Yet, as left-wing journalist Jonah Gindin, one of the most astute commentators on Venezuela events, observes, thus far in Venezuela "the transition from representative to participatory democracy has been painfully slow."⁶³

In the *barrios* of Caracas and other locales there are militant community organizations with heroic records of fighting the police and establishing enhanced community control over local affairs. But, thus far, they are highly localized, and lack the means and resources with which to link into regional and national networks that could begin to establish enduring forms of popular power at larger levels.

Where the greatest progress has taken place, has been in the unions. Here, militant activists, supportive of Chavez but often unwilling to simply rely on presidential initiatives, have fought to create new radical labour organizations. In May 2003, for instance, the National Union of Venezuelan Workers (UNT) was formed, bringing together unions that seek to further the Bolivarian Revolution and create a radical presence for organized labour in the process. Filled with energy and enthusiasm, the UNT appears to be establishing itself as the largest labour movement in Venezuela. And while some UNT activists see themselves simply as *Chavistas* loyal to the president, many argue for an autonomous and radical labour movement that seeks to deepen and extend the revolutionary process by building mass pressure for sweeping change. In fact, these tensions occasionally paralyze the UNT, as they did in June 2006 when its second national congress was

suspended because the *Chavista* element opposed electing national coordinators (and other positions) for the UNT on the bizarre grounds that all efforts should focus on the re-election of Chavez to the presidency later that year. While the more independent currents support re-election of Chavez, they insist that building and developing the UNT should not be subordinated to pro-Chavez maneuvers. Nevertheless, despite these internal tensions, the UNT continues to provide the framework for more radical labour politics.

Indeed, a UNT sponsored workshop in April 2005 on worker/government co-management of workplaces called for decisive moves to increase the participation of both workers and communities in the production and distribution of goods and services. Thus far, there is a tiny but important movement in Venezuela through which workers are taking control (or at least partial control) of workplaces. While it is still small, this movement may be a harbinger of things to come. As one left-wing leader in the UNT explains, "We are working a lot on these experiences of workers' control. Giving power to ordinary people, that can be the leap forward for the pursuit of the revolutionary process."⁶⁴

"We must go beyond surface changes," explains Carlos Gomez, national coordinator of Venezuela's American Solidarity Collective. "This is still capitalism."⁶⁵ True, the Bolivarian Revolution associated with Hugo Chavez has created important spaces in which momentous social struggles are being waged – and these spaces must be defended against both internal and external attack. Moreover, millions of Venezuelans are embracing the cause of a new socialism that would eradicate poverty and social exclusion. But the structures of capitalist ownership and power are still intact. If a genuinely anti-capitalist revolution is to succeed, new forms of popular power and radical democracy will be required through which the formerly oppressed begin to take control of economic, social and political life. The future of Venezuela's inspiring experiment depends on it.

The Two Souls of Trade Unionism

The mass struggles in Puerto Rico, Cochabamba and Venezuela illustrate the possibilities for a new model of labour action, one that breaks sharply with the bureaucratic, compromising trade unionism dominant in most countries. In fact, the contrast between these two approaches is as old as trade unionism itself.

The heart of the issue is a contradiction inherent to unions in capitalist society. On the one hand, unions are a form of collective organization of workers against capital. By fostering cooperative organization and action, they play a tremendously progressive role in countering fragmentation and building bonds of solidarity. On the other hand, a principal function of unions is to negotiate better terms for the sale of labour to capital – in short, to improve workers' position within capitalism. This produces a conservative tendency within unions, an inclination to accept capitalism and disavow radical change. The result is a contradictory situation in which "trade unions are dialectically both in opposition to capitalism and a component of it."⁶⁶

Once capitalist classes learn to live with unions – which they generally do reluctantly, only after efforts to crush them have failed – they then attempt to co-opt organized labour. They do so by courting a "special relationship" with union leaders who, as their organizations become larger and more complex, typically assume the role of full-time union functionaries. Almost invariably, capitalists offer recognition of unions and a promise to negotiate with them in return for a "responsible" and "business-like" trade unionism that disavows anti-capitalist radicalism. Wages and working conditions are regularized and collective bargaining accepted on condition that union leaders will discipline their own ranks, preventing unauthorized strikes, slowdowns and sabotage. Under these circumstances, there is massive pressure for unions to become bureaucratic bargaining machines, dominated by professional negotiators and their staffs, and disconnected from their rank-and-file members. Seeing members as "uninformed" types

who have to be "sold" a contract agreement, union bureaucracies frequently take on the role of managers of discontent, a labour elite that works with management to "smooth over" problems that arise.⁶⁷

Instead of organizations dedicated to the emancipation of all the poor and the oppressed, bureaucratic business unions – the form that is dominant particularly in North America and Europe – assume the role of special agencies for the betterment of the conditions of a small section of workers. They abandon their potential as organizations for radical change and become a loyal opposition, a part of the status quo. To take one recent example, the *New York Times* ran a story in June 2001 entitled "White House and Unions Look for Common Ground," which revealed that American labour leaders were making substantial donations to Republican lawmakers and that a dozen union presidents had recently held a dinner with seventeen Republican politicians.⁶⁸ Rather than forming a radical opposition movement, the bulk of America's labour leaders have become minor partners of the US ruling class, publicly supporting Bush's "war against terrorism." The positions of labour leaders in Europe, Canada, Australia or Japan are scarcely better.⁶⁹

Unions that function this way give up any claim to being leading forces for radical social change. Instead, they take up the role of "special interest groups" unconcerned with the plight of the marginalized and unorganized at home and abroad. As long ago as 1865, Marx warned British workers about this danger, urging that they fight for human liberation across the board by demonstrating "that their efforts are far from narrow and egoistic, but, on the contrary, are directed towards the emancipation of the down-trodden masses."⁷⁰

But the position of moderate business unions is far from stable. In periods like the present, capital will take advantage of their passivity and lethargy to slash jobs, reduce wages and even bust unions through the use of scabs during strikes and lockouts (a tactic that has been frighteningly effective in the US). As a result,

unions have been in retreat in most of the major capitalist nations, largely incapable of holding their own in the face of the neoliberal offensive against workers.⁷¹ Yet failures of business unionism can create openings for a more militant sort of class struggle unionism to emerge. Indeed, this is precisely what happened in North America in the 1930s and 1940s when the conservative craft unionism of the American Federation of Labour (AFL) was blown out of the water by a wave of militant sit-down strikes that generated a new brand of radical industrial unionism.

The AFL unions had been utterly ineffective in the face of fifteen years of union-busting (1919-34). Moreover, because they concentrated on the skilled crafts where white men predominated, these unions offered almost nothing to women, black and immigrant workers. Beginning in 1934, however, a wave of strikes led by such groups transformed the labour scene and new mass unions emerged, associated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). By 1937, the sit-down strike – where workers evicted management, occupied the place of work and transformed it into a living space in which they slept, ate together, and organized entertainment – had become radical labour's new tactic of choice. At America's largest manufacturing company, General Motors, 170 sit-downs took place between March and June of that year; in a two-week period in March, Chicago workers organized nearly sixty sit-down actions. Every kind of oppressed group imaginable sat down: women workers at Woolworth's stores in New York; black and white kitchen and laundry workers at that city's Hospital for Joint Diseases; inmates at the state prison in Joliet, Illinois; high school students in Mineville, New York supporting their teachers' contract dispute; children in a Pittsburgh movie theater (when the owner stopped showing "shorts" before the main feature).⁷² The result was the creation of a new culture of class solidarity that broke the anti-union resistance of America's manufacturing tycoons and generated militant forms of working class consciousness and activism.

In the end, however, American capitalism was able to defeat the labour militants who saw the CIO as an instrument of social transformation. The Cold War at home, where radicals of all types were purged, fired and persecuted, combined with the economic expansion of the post-war boom to create conditions in which the new unions could be tamed and domesticated.

The history of trade unionism demonstrates, therefore, an inherent tension within working class organizations in capitalist society. While unions have the capacity to become mass, democratic organizations that mobilize workers to challenge the rule of capital, they also have a tendency to compromise, curry acceptance and lower their sights to piecemeal alterations of the structure of exploitation. For workers smarting under intense oppression, business unionism is often of little value at all. Under such circumstances, militant forms of working class struggle and organization can erupt, as they did in North America in the 1930s. This is true in the North, as the great French strikes of the last decade or so illustrate. But perhaps nowhere has militant unionism been so impressive in recent years as in many of the newly globalized countries, particularly in much of East Asia.

East Asia's New Workers' Movements

It should come as no surprise that East Asia has been the site of new radical workers' movements, as it is the one region outside the core capitalist countries where, over the past quarter-century, a number of nations have emerged as significant industrial producers and exporters. Between 1980 and 1991, for instance, the share of world trade accounted for by Asia (excluding Japan) increased from 9 to 15 per cent – at the same time that virtually every other region of the South dramatically lost ground. By 1994, more than half of all foreign investment in "developing countries" was flowing into East Asian nations such as South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Taiwan.⁷³ Garment and footwear sweatshops, electronics factories, steel mills and auto plants grew

up, alongside international airports, luxury hotels and modern telecommunications systems. In the process, new working classes emerged which are making a major impact on social life.

The late 1980s saw an impressive growth in trade union membership throughout much of the region. Between just 1987 and 1989, for example, union membership rose by 27 per cent in Bangladesh, 38 per cent in the Philippines and 100 per cent in Korea.⁷⁴ In many of these cases, militant new union movements emerged. While these have faced a number of problems – police repression, anti-union laws, and their own tendencies toward business unionism – they have also, in a number of cases, provided hopeful examples of a more genuinely class struggle unionism. In this regard, the emergence of the new workers' movement in Korea deserves special attention, as do developments in Indonesia.

Indonesia: Bringing Down Suharto and Organizing for Workers' Rights

While militant students played a crucial role in toppling the Suharto dictatorship in May 1998, it would be a mistake to ignore the role of working class activism in destabilizing the regime. In the face of brutal military and state repression, grassroots union organizing and strikes since the late-1980s had created a small but important space for social activism.

The keys to Indonesia's economic growth during the Suharto period (1965-98) were the opening of the country to foreign investment, exploitation of oil and mineral resources, and the development of sweatshop industries catering to the likes of Nike, the Gap and Banana Republic. Young people drawn from the countryside became a new urban proletariat, while in the sweatshops young women constituted a majority of the workforce. At the end of the 1980s, "a new era of workers' resistance began" that involved strikes by hundreds of thousands of workers in the industrial suburbs around the capital city, Jakarta.⁷⁵ A high point was reached in April 1994 when the illegal Indonesian Prosperity

Workers' Union (SBSI) organized month-long demonstrations at two hundred factories and a rally of 25,000 workers at government offices.

Meanwhile, left-wing student radicals had launched a workers' organization of their own, the Center for Indonesian Labour Struggle (PPBI). In July 1995, the Center organized a strike of 13,000 garment workers in Bogor; shortly after the fall of Suharto it brought out 20,000 workers in a combined strike and community protest in Surabaya. Among the activists involved in building the PPBI was the charismatic Dita Sari, then in her early twenties. A founder of the People's Democratic Party (PRD), Sari helped organize rallies of 10,000 workers prior to her arrest in July 1996.

Union organization in Indonesia is much more community-based than in the West, since open political activism at the workplaces is often unsafe. Typically, unions are built through secret meetings in working class neighbourhoods, out of sight of the employers and the police. Neighbourhood organizing has given unions a unique resilience, rooting them in the localities where working class activists live. During the upheaval that brought down Suharto in 1998, small groups of radical workers joined students in the streets for the confrontations with riot police that eventually cracked the dictatorship. Since then, workers have gained more legal and political space for organization and unions have grown considerably.

Today, the Indonesian Prosperity Labor Union has developed to probably a few hundred thousand organized members, while the more radical National Front for Indonesian Labor Struggle (FNPBI, successor of the PPBI) has managed to bring together some tens of thousands and has staged successful May Day marches.⁷⁶ These new unions often suffer, however, from domination by radical students and professionals and from weak structures of membership democracy. In a promising development, at the FNPBI's second congress, held in July 2000, more workers

were brought onto the executive board, a majority of whose members are now women.⁷⁷

The independent workers' movement in Indonesia is especially impressive for what it achieved – and continues to achieve – in the face of state and employer violence. A poor sweatshop proletariat has managed to organize itself, wage militant strikes, engage in political action and force the government to withdraw its most anti-union laws. This is not to underestimate the difficulties the movement faces, particularly from right-wing religious organizations that have been used to attack picket lines and union offices. The government too continues to obstruct independent unionism. In November 2001, for instance, police attacked 1,000 striking department store workers and arrested eight FNPBI leaders, including Dita Sari, who had only been released from her Suharto-era imprisonment in July 1999.

Despite such repression, union activism has continued – and scored important victories. Worker militancy forced the Indonesian government to pass a Manpower Act in 2003 that legally protects the right to organize unions and to strike. Then, in 2006, the government tried to effectively undo the Act, introducing a package of labour “reforms” that would have made it much easier for employers to fire workers; would have encouraged contracting out of union jobs; and would have gutted employer obligations for health benefits and severance pay. Yet, as the *Asia Times* noted (April 25, 2006), these government proposals ran smack into “an increasingly emboldened and sometimes militant workforce.” Through the Workers Challenge Alliance, a coalition of dozens of unions and progressive organizations, a campaign of mass action was launched which included plans for a general strike. In the face of mounting working class opposition, the government withdrew the legislation. In defeating a neoliberal assault on labour rights, Indonesia's new labour movements accomplished something many larger, wealthier (but extremely timid and bureaucratic) union movements in the West have failed to achieve. In so doing,

they continue to raise a banner of hope for all the exploited and oppressed.

Korea: Laboratory of Class Struggle Unionism

Without a doubt, the most electrifying developments of the past twenty years have occurred in Korea, where mass strikes have created one of the more powerful labour movements in the world.

Korea's industrial transformation has been staggering. After the terrible damage of Japanese occupation followed by war on Korean soil between the United States and Russia, the country began an accelerated process of industrialization. By the early 1990s, more than three-quarters of the population lived in urban areas (unheard of in most of the South) and the country boasted major steel, auto, shipbuilding and electronics industries. Women became an integral component of the industrial working class, comprising 40 per cent of the workforce. And they were the spark plugs of the great labour uprising that has built the new unions.

The democratic union movement in Korea traces itself back to the heroic six-year struggle (1972-78) of women at Dongil Textile to win union rights. Despite beatings, arrests and firings, the women elected the country's first female union president and refused to surrender. Then, in May 1979, when police assaults on women workers resulted in a death, riots broke out in a number of cities. A year later, following the death of dictator Park, 40,000 troops were sent in to Kwangju City to put down a popular uprising. Martial law was imposed, labour rights suspended, and the Garment Workers Union outlawed.⁷⁸

Still, Korean workers refused to buckle. Another strike wave, spearheaded by women workers in the Kurodong industrial estate on the edges of Seoul, galvanized tens of thousands of workers. Then came the explosion of 1987 when the Korean Women Workers Association (KWWA) managed to unite large numbers of sweatshop workers. When employers sent in thugs to beat up

women strikers in Masan and Changwon, thousands of workers and students took to the streets. Thirty new unions were formed in Masan-Changwan in the course of the struggle. Meanwhile, the labour explosion had gone national, as hundreds of thousands of workers joined strikes and street battles with riot police. Roughly 1.3 million workers took part in 3,600 strikes in Korea in 1987, organizing 1,200 new unions in the process.⁷⁹ Even larger strikes swept Masan-Changwon the following year, leading some to refer to the area as a "liberated zone." By 1990, union membership in Korea had doubled from one to two million in the space of just over three years.

All of this labour organizing was illegal, as were the new unions. To protest this state of affairs, the (illegal) Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) waged a million-strong general strike in December 1996. The following year, a catastrophic economic meltdown hit East Asia and unions were thrown onto the defensive; in Korea, 10,000 workers received layoff notices every day at the peak of the crisis.⁸⁰ The Asian crisis has had a demoralizing and disorienting affect on workers throughout the region. The KCTU was thrown into crisis, some of its leaders agreeing to accept layoffs of union workers before a rank and file upheaval forced them from office. Nevertheless, a planned general strike was aborted when it became clear that the effects of mass layoffs had shaken workers' confidence.⁸¹ KCTU unions have been unable to prevent layoffs at Hyundai Motors, Mando Machinery, Daewoo Motors and many other workplaces. Severe state repression has also made activism difficult: thousands of Daewoo workers protesting layoffs were attacked by riot police on numerous occasions throughout 2000 and 2001, as were 1,000 striking workers at the Lotte Hotel in Seoul. Altogether, 218 trade unionists were imprisoned in Korea in 2001, including Dan Byung-ho, KCTU president.

Despite this level of repression, and strategic difficulties that have yet to be sorted through, Korean labour has continued to organize with a militancy and determination that puts unions

in the West to shame. August 1999 saw the inauguration of the first nationwide, multi-industry union of women workers, the Korean Women's Trade Union (KWTU), which is now organizing contingent labourers such as women working in restaurants and cafeterias, freelance writers for TV, and golf caddies.⁸² In the face of government crackdowns on unions, the KCTU also staged a general strike on July 5, 2001 to protest the arrest and incarceration of trade unionists.

While the KCTU continues to struggle with tendencies toward compromise and bureaucratization, it has not entirely succumbed. Particularly noteworthy is its launch of the Migrant Workers Trade Union (MTU) in 2005. The MTU, with a membership of 400,000, represents a hugely important initiative to organize and defend the most vulnerable and oppressed section of the Korean working class. Under Korean law, migrant workers can work for only three years and for only one employer. As the KCTU points out, "these workers are bound to the employer like slaves." Moreover, the government regularly deports as "terrorists" migrant workers who protest their oppressive conditions. Nevertheless, since 2002, a wave of demonstrations, sit-ins and hunger strikes by migrant workers has thrust their plight and their demands onto the political stage. And the KCTU has distinguished itself, especially by comparison with most unions in the West, as a proud and determined champion of migrant workers and their union.

At the same time, the KCTU has tried to hold to a radical stance on the crucial issues of world politics. After September 11, 2001, the organization came out in powerful opposition to America's "war against terrorism," and has hosted a conference of workers from the South on the theme "another world, another future is possible." Whatever their failings, the courageous struggles of Korean workers are proof that this is so.⁸³

New Workers' Movements throughout the South

While the Korean case is the most powerful, as the following instances suggest, there are many other inspiring examples of grassroots union organizing and mass strikes throughout the South.

- In Nigeria, the four million-strong Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has launched its own struggles against neoliberalism, including repeated general strikes against increases in fuel prices. While the NLC is plagued by compromises with the government, it has also organized mass protests, albeit bureaucratically controlled. In June 2000, the union federation organized a national strike after the government hiked oil and gas prices by 50 per cent – a hike that triggered immediate rises in bus fares and food prices. Nigeria is the world's sixth largest producer of crude oil, yet the people have seen none of its benefits. In fact, fully seventy per cent of the population lives on less than \$1 a day. The idea that should be further impoverished by having to pay more for a commodity that their country produces in huge supplies provokes widespread opposition. Moreover, the gas and oil price increases were seen as IMF-inspired in a country where, as a result of numerous Structural Adjustment Programs, SAP is effectively a swear word. As the NLC's June 2000 general strike got underway, banks, post offices, hospitals and public services all ground to a halt. Strikers and jobless youth threw up barricades on major roads throughout Lagos and other towns. On the first day, the government offered to reduce the price hike, but the unions refused to budge, insisting that the entire increase be rolled back. After five days, the price hikes were reduced from 50 to 10 per cent – a major victory for the unions and popular movements.⁸⁴ Still, the government took the offensive again a year and a half later, announcing new increases on January 1, 2002. Once again, the NLC called a general strike,

and this one too had massive support. One Lagos newspaper reported that "Alausa was a ghost town as the workers did not turn up for work... In Kaduna, activities were paralyzed as union activists took over the major streets in the metropolis, mounted barricades and prevented vehicular movement."⁸⁵ Yet another general strike, this time against a 25 per cent hike in fuel prices, broke out in October 2004, resulting in multiple deaths at the hands of police. Even the repeated arrests of NLC president, Adams Oshiomhole, on January 16, 2002 and again on October 9, 2004, were unable to break the militancy and determination of the strikers whose defiance has inspired workers across Africa.

- In Bangladesh, the National Garment Workers Union (NGWU), organizing a sweatshop proletariat composed largely of young women, has brought 20,000 workers in Dhaka into its ranks. While these are modest achievements in a workforce of 1.2 million garment workers, they are also tremendously important in an industry where life is cheap – witness the rash of factory fires – and where workers earn as little as \$42 (US) a month for eighty to one hundred hours of work each week producing goods for Tommy Hilfiger, Gap and J.C. Penney, among others. In a sign of growing strength, the NGWU was able to organize a solid strike in July 2001. Following another horrific fire in February 2006, in which hundreds were killed or maimed, over 18,000 garment workers waged a half-day protest strike. Protests like these are testimony to the courage and determination of its activists in building a fighting union of sweatshop workers.⁸⁶
- While workers, peasants and the poor of India have been reeling under the combined assault of the IMF, World Bank and WTO, on the one hand, and a right-wing Hindu fundamentalist government on the other, major resistance struggles have occurred. In January 2000, a strike by 90,000 power workers in Uttar Pradesh won a twelve-month delay in plans to privatize electricity. Then, in May of that year, one million work-

ers joined a one-day general strike against price increases, privatization, cuts to fertilizer subsidies, attacks on Muslims and other minority groups, and against the IMF, World Bank and WTO. The year ended with December strikes by one million bank workers against privatization, and by 600,000 postal workers demanding pensions for part-time workers. Mass strikes continued in parts of the country throughout 2001, including one in the state of Maharashtra to protest "the onslaught of globalization, privatization and liberalization." Alongside the big, public protest events, there have also been interesting developments at the level of tiny workplaces. While most unions ignore homeworkers, the Navayuga Beedi Karmika Sangam union in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh has managed to organize thousands of homeworkers producing beedis (Indian cigarettes). Until the 1970s, beedis were largely produced in factories, but most of these were shut down as manufacturers shifted production to women labouring in the home. In the late 1980s, the union began a house-to-house organizing campaign, bringing 5,000 homeworkers into the union by 1994. While the union has waged strikes, its most effective actions have been citywide demonstrations that overcome isolation and bring the issues to a wider public. In addition to organizing the sorts of workers most labour organizations neglect, the beedi workers' union has won improved wages and entitlements to maternity benefits, paid holidays and weekly days off.⁸⁷

- In recent years, Taiwan has witnessed the rise of a new unionism, much of it associated with the Federation of Independent Unions formed in 1988. Taiwan is a classic case of a "newly industrializing" nation which has witnessed growing restiveness among workers. While there were 485 strikes in the country in 1975, a decade later the number had more than tripled to 1,600; by 1994 the number of labour disputes surpassed 2,000. In November of the latter year, the first ever nationwide strike was organized against government attempts to raise workers'

national health payments, with 30,000 workers from more than two hundred unions joining the action. This action was followed in 1995 by mass demonstrations against the privatization of fourteen government-owned firms, including the national telecommunications company.⁸⁸ On May Day 2000, a mass rally of 20,000 in the streets of Taipei celebrated the launch of the Taiwan Confederation of Trade Unions.⁸⁹

- Since 1985, when the inspiring September 19 Garment Workers Union was launched after an earthquake hit Mexico City, an upsurge of independent unionism has begun transforming the Mexican labour movement. Especially encouraging was the formation of the May First *Intersindical*, which initially came together to build a militant and independent May Day march in 1995. Up to half a million workers filled the streets of Mexico City on that day; even more came out a year later. The movement has also regularly mobilized in support of the Zapatistas. Like many radical labour movements, the *Intersindical* includes members from community organizations, rank-and-file opposition groups in the "official" unions (tied to the historic ruling party, the PRI) and leftist parties.⁹⁰ Even in the *maquiladora* zones, in the face of terrific repression from police and thugs, workers have started to form independent unions. A huge step forward came in 2002 when independent unions, peasants groups and urban social movements came together to create the Union, Peasant, Social, Indigenous and popular Front (FSCISP). By 2004, this radical working class coalition was launching significant mass protests and opening up potential space for new radical politics.⁹¹
- Perhaps few developments are more inspiring than the series of general strikes waged by unions in Colombia against neoliberalism. In a country where assassinations of union leaders are commonplace, workers have found the courage and conviction to defy the government. Since its signing of an IMF bailout agreement in 1999, the government of President Pastrana has been rocked three times by general strikes. On

June 7, 2001, close to one million workers brought large parts of the country to a standstill. Roughly 300,000 teachers and 125,000 healthcare workers were joined by hundreds of thousands of others, including oil workers in Barrancabermeja. Protesters also set up roadblocks in many parts of the country. As teachers' federation president Gloria Ramirez explained, the general strike was directed not only against recent budget cuts, but against the entire "neoliberal model" imposed by the IMF.⁹²

- After years of quiescence, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) staged a three-day general strike against privatization in late August 2001 and followed this up in May 2006 with another mass strike. One of the most radical labour movements in the world throughout the 1980s, COSATU had surrendered its militancy once the African National Congress assumed office (first under Nelson Mandela, then Thabo M'Beki). Yet, despite the end of racial apartheid, life has gotten worse for black workers throughout South Africa: half a million jobs have been lost since 1993, leaving one-third of the labour force unemployed. Living standards for the poor have dropped by more than 20 per cent at the same time as water costs have jumped 55 per cent and electricity bills 400 per cent. Eight million people are homeless. "Apartheid based on race has been replaced with apartheid based on class," proclaims former ANC activist Trevor Ngwane. COSATU's general strikes, first launched and then extended only because of enormous pressure from below, could signal the beginning of a new period of mobilization for social justice by Africa's largest working class.⁹³

While unions in the North have generally been in retreat and decline for a quarter-century, new workers' movements in the South are demonstrating powerfully that there is a future for working class politics North and South – at least for militant, democratic, grassroots class struggle politics.

Workers of Colour and Social Movement Unionism in the United States

While the South has been the focal point for the most exciting experiments in militant, grassroots unionism, even in the very heartland of world capitalism, the United States, workers of colour have been forging new weapons of struggle. Despite lack of support, and in some cases outright hostility, from bureaucratic business unions that have been in retreat for nearly thirty years, black, Latino and Asian-American workers have given notice that there is a future for radical working class movements in the United States.

Not surprisingly, one of the centers of these developments is California, the most multi-ethnic state in the US. Latinos, most of them from Mexico and Central America, make up one-third of California's population, while Asian-Americans comprise 12 per cent. Traditional "Anglos" account for half the people in the state. Latinos and Asian-Americans comprise the bulk of the proletariat in sweatshops, hotels and janitorial services. In fact, over 70 per cent of immigrant manual workers in California are Latino.⁹⁴ While these groups are the most oppressed workers in California – toiling long hours for sub-standard wages and, in the case of "illegals," without labour code protections – they are also the leaders of a growing fight back movement.

Ironically, this resistance began during the anti-union heydays of the Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations. The courageous 1980 strike of San Francisco hotel workers, who had toppled the former leadership of Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 2 and turned it into a militant, grassroots union, was the harbinger of things to come. With Filipina and Latina hotel maids comprising 95 per cent of all picketers, Local 2 won major improvements to wages and working conditions, and has gone on to organize 80 per cent of the large hotels in the city.⁹⁵

In the early 1990s, one of the largest successful organizing drives among Latino immigrants shook the southern California

construction industry. In the course of a well-prepared and militant five-month strike – in which hundreds of strikers were arrested, and many of them threatened with deportation – thousands of workers won higher wages and union recognition.⁹⁶

But perhaps no struggle has so clearly blazed a trail for a different kind of unionism than the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles, associated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). For years, SEIU Local 399 had been a declining force in LA's cleaning service industry. While massive amounts of new office space went up in the 1980s and 1990s, the union did nothing to organize the thousands of new janitorial workers from Mexico and Central America, many of whom are women. Then, Justice for Janitors (JfJ) was kick-started in southern California in 1988. After some modest but important organizing successes, JfJ/Local 399 took strike action in late spring 1990. When police brutally attacked a peaceful JfJ march on June 15, the janitors' struggle became the cause celebre of social justice activism in LA. Under massive public pressure, International Service Systems, a multinational building services firm, signed a contract. Seeing the writing on the wall, American Building Maintenance soon also signed a contract with the union – a move that saw between 5,000 and 6,000 immigrant workers win union protection and improved wages.⁹⁷ In a tremendous about-turn, worker unionization in cleaning services in LA soared from 10 per cent in 1987 to 90 per cent by 1995.⁹⁸

Offering dramatic proof that their initial successes were no flash in the pan, 8,500 office janitors waged a militant three-week strike in April 2000 – featuring mass rallies, marches and pickets – winning a 25 per cent pay raise over three years. As important as the improved living standards for workers making poverty wages is the boost JfJ has given to immigrant workers' struggles for human rights and social justice. In fact, 1999 saw the largest successful union organizing drive since the 1930s when 74,000 home-care workers in Los Angeles County, most of them Latino, voted to join the SEIU after an eleven-year campaign to orga-

nize workers in the industry.⁹⁹ As a result of campaigns like these, the labour movement in LA, a traditionally anti-union city, has become the most dynamic in North America. As one observer notes,

By focusing its organizing on immigrant workers, the city's labor movement is adding workers faster than unions anywhere else in the country. In recent years, unions have organized 6,000 part-time school aides, 2,000 food service workers and retail workers at the international airport and 2,000 Los Angeles park and recreation workers.¹⁰⁰

But organized labour's breakthroughs in LA have entailed more than just "focusing" on immigrant workers; they have also involved new strategies and forms of organizing. Central to the new strategic approach is a community-based orientation that makes organizing for the civil and human rights of immigrants as important as the fight to improve wages and working conditions. All of this involves a shift toward what has been called social movement unionism, a brand of labour activism in which unions are not merely collective bargaining agents, but also social movements fighting for progressive change on all fronts. In this area, union organizers have been able to draw upon the innovative approaches used by workers' centers that run storefront offices where immigrant workers can meet, learn about their legal rights, discuss union and community organizing campaigns – all away from the eyes of employers and government agencies.

In cities with large immigrant labour forces, workers' centers create openings for new forms of working class organizing. In these spaces, workers of colour have designed consumer boycotts, hunger strikes, union drives, pickets, court challenges and labour strikes to pressure employers, defend immigrants, oppose police racism, win improved wages and conditions of work, campaign for better housing and public services, and defeat anti-immigrant laws. Groups such as *La Mujer Obrera* (The Woman Worker) in El Paso Texas; the Asian Immigrant Women Advocates in Oak-

land, California (which launched the Garment Workers Justice Campaign); the Center for Third World Organizing; Korean Immigrant Workers Advocate in LA; *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* (which organizes Latina domestic workers in San Francisco); *Fuerza Unida* (United Force) in San Antonio, Texas; People Organized to Win Employment Rights (a union of workfare workers in San Francisco); and the Labor/Community Strategy Center in LA have created workers' organizations based in local communities which frequently operate in several languages. Collaboration between several of these groups in LA also led to the launch of the multi-ethnic Garment Workers Center.¹⁰¹

Despite overt hostility from some business unions, these centers have been launching pads for unionizing drives. In 1991, for example, *La Mujera Obrera* unionized three factories and one laundry in Texas.¹⁰² But unlike mainstream North American unionism, which largely limits its focus to contract negotiations, the workers' centers treat all the issues facing poor and immigrant communities — from housing problems and police racism to union rights and the danger of toxic substances dumped in communities of colour — as the terrain of working class organizing. Unlike union leaderships that appear every few years when it's time to negotiate a new contract, the centers aspire to become living organisms, thoroughly integrated into the daily life of poor, working class communities. As Saladin Muhammad, an activist with Black Workers for Justice in North Carolina and Local 150 of the United Electrical Workers put it, the task is to create "a culture of protest" that links civil rights and social justice activism with worker education and labour action.¹⁰³

The effect of organizing thousands of militant immigrant workers of colour has been to radicalize the whole of the labour movement in California. As David Bacon points out, rank-and-file activists have overturned conservative leaderships in several important union locals, and California's labour federation was the first in the US to call "for abolishing employer sanctions against undocumented workers." A number of other unions in the state

are going through significant upheavals as workers of colour remake them as fighting instruments for workers' rights.¹⁰⁴

But it is not just California where militant, grassroots, community-based union activism is at work. In New York City, the Chinese Workers and Staff Association (CWSA) has been active since 1979 organizing restaurant and garment workers. In recent years, CWSA has worked closely with the Latino Workers Center, creating a multicultural workers alliance that has produced important gains. Only miles away, the Workplace Project on Long Island has also developed innovative strategies for organizing Latino workers, many from Central America, who work in restaurants and sweatshop factories and as cleaners.¹⁰⁵

Sometimes, effective working class activism can be focussed on social-economic issues entirely outside the workplace. This has largely been the approach of the Labor/Community Strategy Center in LA and its main offshoot, the Bus Riders' Union (BRU). Beginning in the mid-1990s, the BRU identified the racial and class biases of the transit system in LA: while bus riders constitute 94 per cent of all transit passengers, only 30 per cent of the system's spending goes into bus service. Meanwhile, 70 per cent of public transit funds are devoted to a rail system that serves a small, wealthier and predominantly white clientele in the suburbs.¹⁰⁶ Under the slogan "Billions for Buses, Fight Transit Racism," the BRU initiated a militant campaign, built a multiracial organization and has won significant battles to improve bus service.

The BRU uses on-the-bus organizing to build its base. Teams of activists board buses, all of them wearing colourful BRU T-shirts, to deliver speeches and pass out literature. The union also mobilizes protests at transit commission and city council meetings and holds rallies and demonstrations. At the heart of BRU strategy is the recognition of public transit as a working class issue:

The bus is what we call a factory on wheels, carrying the Korean restaurant worker, the Thai woman garment workers, the Latino hotel worker, the black department store worker, the black and Latino domestic

workers, high school kids with their boom boxes, the black and Latino parolees ... the bus system creates one of the multi-racial contexts in which an appeal to a common destiny and a common enemy can be made ...¹⁰⁷

The BRU reaches 50,000 transit passengers every month, holds sizable monthly meetings of its multiracial membership, and publishes a bilingual (Spanish/English) newspaper called *Ahora Now*.¹⁰⁸ While it is not clear how it has handled the development of a democratic, multiracial leadership, the BRU has developed a number of effective organizing tactics. In addition, during the 2000 strike of LA transit drivers, the BRU did impressive work building solidarity between predominantly African-American bus drivers (whose union leadership has been hostile to the BRU) and riders, who are predominantly Latino. The BRU organized large rallies to support the drivers' strike and, in an unprecedented development, got 850 drivers to sign letters demanding no cuts in bus service – a demand which their union leaders have traditionally refused to support. The result is an opening toward “a new alliance” of drivers and riders against the LA transit authority.¹⁰⁹

Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), which emerged in North Carolina in the 1980s, is another important grassroots, community-based workers' organization. In a notoriously anti-union state, BWFJ managed to wage stunningly successful community actions against both Kmart and the Shoney's restaurant chain for their racist treatment of black employees. Using civil rights tactics – from petitions, to church rallies, to marches and sit-ins – BWFJ has spearheaded militant, community-based working class activism. The group also later waged a successful battle for union rights at Kmart. Linking working class politics to community struggles, the organization has also worked actively around tenants' rights, environmental racism, and anti-war campaigns. In the late 1990s, BWFJ helped to organize 19,000 housekeeping staff at the University of North Carolina's fifteen campuses. Linking with the United Electrical Workers, the group built a mass

action campaign that has won significant gains for poor workers. Given this record, it is not surprising that by the mid-1990s, BWFJ had moved beyond North Carolina to establish active chapters in Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia.¹¹⁰

BWFJ, Justice for Janitors, the workers' centers and similar movements are all expressions of a new form of working class politics in which issues of race and gender are made central to community-based organizing. California, New York and North Carolina are not the only areas of the US where such strategies are being developed, of course: *La Mujer Obrera* and *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* are based in Texas, and some impressive labour/community campaigns centrally involving African-American workers have been built in cities like Hartford, Connecticut.¹¹¹ Similarly, in Canada's largest city, Toronto, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), the country's most militant and flamboyant anti-poverty organization, has worked to organize taxi drivers, overwhelmingly immigrant men, and street vendors in the city's Chinatown. OCAP also does militant work around immigrant rights, including occupations of Immigration Canada offices to force officials to grant hearings. As a result of this spirited work, individuals and families from Afghanistan, Somalia and elsewhere have won legal status in Canada. Wherever possible, OCAP has made it a habit to mobilize left-wing union activists as part of these campaigns to defend immigrants and refugees.¹¹²

The latter – winning union support for militant, community-based activism – has, however, often proved difficult. Even some of the most successful campaigns have run into bureaucratic hostility from business union leaders. For instance, Local 399 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in LA, which was built out of the Justice for Janitors campaign, found itself placed in trusteeship – an arrangement in which the national union strips local union members of powers to elect their own representatives and run their own affairs – as a result of their 1995 rank and file campaign to elect a new, more militant local leadership. Since

that time, forty more SEIU locals have been placed in trusteeship in an effort to squelch rank and file initiatives.¹¹³

Still, despite government repression, hostile employers and bureaucratic union leaders, immigrant workers and workers of colour continue to mobilize with great audacity and courage. In October 2004, at least 100,000 people rallied in New York City to support a three-week long Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride. Then, on May Day 2006, perhaps a million and a half immigrant workers revived the real meaning of international workers' day in the US. Pouring into the streets in over 200 cities and towns across the country to demand full legalization and dignity for undocumented immigrant worker, these workers responded to the national call for *Un día sin inmigrante* — "a day without immigrants." Skipping work and school, immigrant labourers closed factories and shops to attend the marches and rallies, including a huge rally of perhaps half a million in Chicago. For that one day, in the midst the biggest multi-national civil rights/social movement in US history, immigrant workers flexed their muscles and proudly and courageously displayed the potential future of organized labour in North America.

Anti-Racist, Feminist Class Politics

What all the organizations described in this chapter point to is a new kind of working class politics: a class struggle politics, to be sure, but also an anti-racist, feminist class politics. When we look at the central role of women organizers in the Save Narmada Movement in India, the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, or the new labour movement in Korea, the leading role played by indigenous peoples in popular uprisings in Ecuador and Bolivia, the powerful agency of immigrants and workers of colour in movements like Justice for Janitors or the workers' centers, we see the outlines of a form of labour organizing that is based upon the self-activity of the most oppressed sections of the global working class.

And here we find the seeds of a radically different form of class politics. After all, mainstream trade unionism, particularly in the North, has frequently been dominated by organizations of white male workers. Immigrants, contingent workers, women of colour in homes and sweatshops have only rarely found a place in these institutions. Seeking respectability, privileged labour leaders have created a movement that typically excludes the "rabble" and the marginalized, and disavows their "in your face" style of activism. Rather than leading a struggle for universal emancipation, one that challenges all structures of privilege and oppression, too often mainstream unionism has been, in Marx's words, "narrow and egoistic." Instead of seeing racism and sexism as problems that must be addressed by the whole labour movement, mainstream union officials have repeatedly dismissed struggles around these issues as "divisive," as threats to the "unity" of workers around economic goals. The result has often been a politics of labour "unity" that refuses to embrace the struggles of the most oppressed workers.

From the start, as we have seen in chapter 4, capitalism has been a system of racial and gender domination, one in which class exploitation is always constituted in and through forms of gender and racial subordination. Writing about Canada, Himani Bannerji reminds us that "Forms of property and labour enshrined in Canada, from the first land grabbing occupation to now, have been wholly organized by and inscribed with the difference of 'race' and ethnicity. There is no 'class' here without 'race.'" ¹¹⁴ Without the theft of aboriginal lands and the destruction of native ways of life, without enslavement of Africans, without colonization and imperial domination of most of the peoples of the globe, the actual capitalism we face today would not exist. To organize in any meaningful sense against the historical reality of capitalism is impossible without organizing against racism, the oppression of women, and imperialism.

To be sure, effective organization against the system requires a class politics, one dedicated to ending the exploitation of all who

sell their labour. But since the sellers of labour are organized in terms of systems of racial and gender domination, capitalism cannot be attacked at its roots unless racial and gender oppression are fundamentally and centrally challenged. Class politics is not an abstraction, not a program for social change transported from the skies. Class politics are the politics of resistance, opposition and transformation that grow out of the concrete experience of oppressed peoples. As a result, they are as complex and multi-dimensional as real human beings.

People organized into social classes have experiences framed simultaneously by gender, sexual and ethno-racial relations; they live in actual communities where issues of housing, schools, safety for women on the streets, police harassment and public transportation impinge upon their lives; and they fight back around some or all of these issues in different ways at different moments in their lives. What they resist and how they resist it depends upon their perception of the horizons of social possibility. As Robin Kelley, historian of the black working class in America, puts it, "Politics is not separate from lived experience or the imaginary world of what is possible; to the contrary, politics is about these things. Politics comprises the many battles to roll back constraints and exercise some power over, or create some space within, the institutions and social relationships that dominate our lives."¹¹⁵

Authentic working class politics are about overcoming alienation by winning new dimensions of control over work, play, life, leisure and culture. And in a class-divided society based upon white supremacy, patriarchy and (hetero)sexual regulation, this can only mean overcoming all these forms of oppression and exclusion.¹¹⁶ Real human emancipation – which requires liberation from alienated labour and life – must be just that: emancipation from all forms of subordination and oppression. Anything less is not radical politics. And the only radical politics equal to the task is an anti-racist feminist politics of working class struggle.

To be sure, the movements discussed in this chapter merely carry the "seeds" of such a politics, to use the term I've employed

above. Like all real movements, they negotiate tensions between resistance and accommodation, revolt and compromise, and they struggle internally with gender and racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, by creating new forms of militant struggle and organization in which workers of colour, indigenous peoples, and women in sweatshops play leadership roles, they are living proof of the concrete possibility of an anti-racist, feminist class politics. It is the job of radical anti-capitalists to help nurture those seeds by fostering a political climate in which they might develop and thrive.

Radical Democracy and the Search for Alternatives

An anti-racist, feminist class politics is also the only meaningful politics of radical democracy today. As we saw at the outset of this chapter, the impulse for democracy has always come from below, from the struggles of the poor and the exploited to improve their lives. Capitalism has, of course, endeavoured to tame and control democracy by excluding it from the sphere of social-economic relations. But all the movements we've described trespass beyond the signs that cordon off private property. By occupying lands in Brazil, blocking roads leading to giant dam projects in India, taking over a city square in Bolivia to break a water privatization contract, or boarding buses in Los Angeles as part of a "no fare" campaign, these movements refuse to accept that a tiny fraction of the world's population ought to control all decisions related to the use, distribution and ownership of the world's economic resources. And they also refuse to accept that democracy ends where "economics" begins, that the people have no right to affect the ownership and distribution of society's wealth. Instead, these movements insist that there can be no just society without the right of people to control those relations that affect their livelihood and their survival. In so doing, whether fully aware of it or not, they mobilize a radical democracy against capitalism.

And yet, thus far, these movements have been much more effective at resisting than at overturning; while capable of stopping something regressive, they rarely venture toward the beginning of something entirely new. As the late Daniel Singer explained in a perceptive analysis of the French strikes and demonstrations of 1995, the great accomplishment of the movement was that it had shattered "the fatalistic acceptance" of neoliberal dogma by showing that people could stop a government in its tracks. Yet, as Singer warned, winning a single battle is not enough:

The rulers give up individual proposals but not their strategy. The protesters win a battle and, then, lacking objectives, are unable to launch a counteroffensive ... It is ... the idea that there can be no alternative that the French protesters have now battered ... They did not, however, substitute an alternative of their own ... they did not offer an alternative project, the vision of a different society.

Radical movements cannot change societies without such a vision, however. It is possible to resist, to engage in the powerfully negative act of saying No, without a clear vision of an alternative. But that accomplishment, while immensely important in terms of building confidence and capacities for struggle, only postpones the next battle. For capitalism is unrelenting; give it a chance to try again and it will, often with devastating consequences. What Singer goes on to say about the French events, might be said about any of the struggles we've examined, even one as powerful as the uprising in Cochabamba:

After twenty years or so of total ideological domination, the very refusal, rejection and resistance were vital... It is a crucial beginning. But is only a beginning. On the basis of this negative achievement, the genuine search for a radically different society must begin.¹⁷

Notes

- 1 This protest was organized by the Movement for the Liberation of the Landless (MLST), a much smaller organization than the Landless Workers Movement (MST) which I discuss below.
- 2 See "Bolivia's turmoil has its roots in inequity," *Globe and Mail*, June 11, 2005.
- 3 Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, *Global Showdown: How the New Activists are Fighting Global Corporate Rule* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001), pp. 207, 168.
- 4 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), Book III, Ch. 8, p. 116; see also pp. 115, 162-64.
- 5 For a good summary see W. G. Forrest, *The Emergence of Greek Democracy 800-400 BC* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), Ch. 6.
- 6 Slaves too were excluded from political life. It is important to emphasize, however, that, in contrast to slavery in the "New World," there was no ethno-racial basis to Greek slavery. Slaves were generally other Greeks, captured as prisoners during wars. Moreover, they sometimes had a relatively high social status (as bank managers, for instance) and were frequently freed from servitude after a number of years of service. I say this not to justify the institution, but to contrast it with later forms.
- 7 G. E. M de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 279.
- 8 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 188. See also, Meiksins Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy* (London: Verso Books, 1988).
- 9 M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 75.
- 10 M. I. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 20.
- 11 De Ste. Croix, p. 317.
- 12 See especially, Wood, Ch. 7. I have tried to trace part of this process in English political thought in McNally, "Locke, Levellers and Liberty: Property and Democracy in the Thought of the First Whigs," *History of Political Thought* 10, 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 17-40.
- 13 For a particularly illuminating discussion of this see Dennis Soron, "Economic Fatalism and Popular-Democratic Struggle," Ph.D. dissertation in Social and Political Thought, York University, Toronto, December 2001.
- 14 On Britain see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (New York: Mentor Books, 1975), p. 111; John A. Macdonald, "Speech on the Québec Resolutions" in *Canadian Political Thought*, ed. H. D. Forbes (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 85.
- 15 Wood, p. 229. Wood uses the expression "expulsion of politics" with respect to economic life on p. 44.

- 16 See Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).
- 17 Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, as quoted in "Globalisation and its critics," *The Economist*, September 29, 2001.
- 18 "Capitalism, its critics and its global challenge," *Globe and Mail* editorial, October 28, 2000.
- 19 Jorge Castaneda, "Latin America's Two Left Wings," *Newsweek*, January 9, 2006.
- 20 Tomas Kellner, "Power Without Firebombs," *Forbes*, November 27, 2000.
- 21 Gerard Greenfield, "The Success of Being Dangerous: Resisting Free Trade and Investment Regimes," *Studies in Political Economy* 64 (Spring 2001), p. 86.
- 22 *Globe and Mail* editorial, October 28, 2000.
- 23 See, for instance, Barlow and Clarke, pp. 2, 5, 92, 125, 164-7, 169, 172, 180, 186-7, 191, 194, 204-5, 220. To their credit, toward the end of their book (p. 207), Barlow and Clarke do suggest that "To simply call it a civil society movement is not quite enough."
- 24 See, for instance, Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). For some interesting criticisms of the class, gender and racial exclusions characteristic of bourgeois civil society, see essays by Nancy Fraser, Mary P. Ryan and Geoff Eley in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).
- 25 For a discussion of how politeness and refinement became central concerns of the Scottish middle classes in the eighteenth century see David McNally, *Political Economy and the Rise of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 154-74, 192-208.
- 26 Some commentators trace their use of "civil society" back to the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. In so doing, they tend to forget that Gramsci analyzed the institutions of civil society as a key terrain upon which the capitalist class secured its "hegemony" over subordinate classes.
- 27 Kellner.
- 28 James Petras, "Latin America: The Resurgence of the Left," *New Left Review* 223 (1997), p. 17.
- 29 Ashis K. Biswas, "The New Left?" *Outlook India*, December 31, 2001.
- 30 Soma Wadhwa, "Drown Town," *Outlook India*, December 31, 2001.
- 31 For detail on the NBA and its struggles see the extensive coverage by Maggie Black in *New Internationalist* 336 (July 2001) or visit the website in solidarity with the movement at www.narmada.org. The novelist Arundhati Roy has published a major essay "The Greater Common Good", in solidarity with the people of the Narmada, included in *The Cost of Living* (New York: Modern Library, 1999).

- 32 This particular denunciation comes from B. G. Verghese, "A Poetic Licence," *Outlook India*, July 5, 1999. For continuing resistance, see NBA press releases of December 13 and December 25, 2001, available at www.narmada.org.
- 33 "Open Letter to the President of the World Bank," November 1999.
- 34 Petras, p. 18.
- 35 See Jimmy Langman, "Bolivian natives draw hope from the past," *Globe and Mail*, September 4, 2001. For background see Petras, pp. 26-28.
- 36 Natalia Vinelli, "Interview with Felipe Quispe Huanca, 'We want to govern ourselves,'" *International Viewpoint* 331 (May 2001), p. 27.
- 37 Alexander Norris, "Patroes and pistoleiros: Brazil's land barons refine tactics," *New Internationalist* 236 (October 1992).
- 38 See Sue Branford and Jan Rocha, *Cutting the Wire: The Story of the Landless Movement in Brazil* (London: Latin American Bureau, 2002), p. xii. See also Anders Corr, *No Trespassing: Squatting, Rent Strikes and Land Struggles Worldwide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), p. 146; Petras, p. 24.
- 39 As quoted in Branford and Rocha, p. 67.
- 40 Kinnto Lucas, "Here we are all leaders," *International Viewpoint* 333 (July 2001), p. 34.
- 41 On women in the MST see Branford and Rocha, pp. 258-62. On regional links see Petras, p. 21. And on agricultural practices see Angus Wright and Wendy Wolford, *To Inherit the Earth: The Landless Movement and the Struggle for a New Brazil* (Oakland: Food First Books, 2003), pp. 293-300, and Branford and Rocha, pp. 218-27.
- 42 Quoted by Branford and Rocha, p. 65; quoted by Lucas, p. 33.
- 43 "Marcos's Reflections: Just Another Organization or Something Truly New?" La Realidad, August, 1996" in *Rebellion in Chiapas: An Historical Reader*, ed. John Womack, Jr. (New York: New Press, 1999), p. 320.
- 44 Richard Roman and Edur Velasco Arregui, "Worker Insurgency, Rural Revolt, and the Crisis of the Mexican Regime" in *Rising from the Ashes? Labor in the Age of "Global" Capitalism*, eds. Ellen Meiksins Wood, Peter Meiksins and Michael Yates (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), p. 132.
- 45 For details see Womack Jr., pp. 278-339. Some of the relevant documents are available on the Internet at www.ezln.org.
- 46 Figures on the size of this rally tend to vary from about 80,000 (Womack Jr., p. 332) to 500,000 (Roman and Velasco Arregui, p. 132).
- 47 Paul Hill and Karen Last, "Masks and Silences: the return of the subcommandante," *New Socialist*, August/September 1998, p. 12.
- 48 John Ross, "Rebel Silence," *Now*, July 5-11, 2001. For background see Womack Jr., 304-15.
- 49 "Marcos and the Ark on the Mountain: San Cristobal, July 15-16, 1998" in Womack Jr., p. 359. On The Other Campaign, see Greg Brosnan, "Rebel leader touring Mexico," Reuters, January 2, 2006, and "Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," available at www.narconews.org.

- 50 See James Petras, "The New Revolutionary Peasantry," *Z Magazine*, October 1998; and Petras, "Latin America," pp. 27, 43.
- 51 I am drawing heavily upon the excellent account by Juan Adolfo Montenegro, "No road but the struggle," *International Viewpoint* 320 (April 2000), pp. 17-19.
- 52 Ernesto Herrera, "Ecuador: indigenous mobilization defeats neoliberalism," *International Viewpoint* 329 (March 2001), p. 10.
- 53 Cesar Ayala, "National Strike in Puerto Rico," *New Socialist*, August/September 1998, pp. 14-15 (reprinted from Green Left Weekly).
- 54 Richard Lapper, "Anger in the Andes," *Financial Times*, April 26, 2000.
- 55 Jim Shultz, "Just add water," *This Magazine*, July/August 2000, p. 13.
- 56 Raquel Gutierrez and Alvaro Garcia Linera, "The rebirth of the multitude," *International Viewpoint* 323 (July-August 2000), pp. 12-13.
- 57 Gutierrez and Garcia Linera, pp. 13-14.
- 58 Gutierrez and Garcia Linera, p. 14.
- 59 Oscar Olivera, *Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), p. 125.
- 60 In addition to the marvelous book by Oscar Olivera, for excellent analysis of Bolivian events see the ongoing coverage by Jeffrey Webber, including the following: "Left Indigenous Struggles in Bolivia," *Monthly Review*, September 2005; "Bolivia, the Second Gas War: The hopes and limitations of popular forces," *New Socialist* 52, July-August 2005; and "We're not crazy: The days of May and June in Bolivia," *New Socialist* 53, Sept/Oct. 2005.
- 61 "Bolivia's turmoil has its roots in inequity," *Globe and Mail*, June 11, 2006. In the course of these struggles, they have built some of the most powerful movements of the oppressed – indigenous peoples, the unemployed, poor farmers and urban workers – anywhere in the world.
- 62 For an excellent treatment of all these events, as well as a balanced assessment of Chavez, see Michael McCaughan, *The Battle of Venezuela* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005). See also Carlos Torres and others, *The Unexpected Revolution: The Venezuelan People Confront Neoliberalism* (Toronto: Socialist Project, 2005).
- 63 Jonah Gindin, "Possible Face of Venezuelan Democracy" in Torres, p. 34.
- 64 "Venezuela: The Party of Revolution and Socialism – Interview with Stalin Perez Borges," *IV Online magazine: IV 371*, October 2005. On Venezuelan labour today, see Jonah Gindin, "Made in Venezuela: The Struggle to Reinvent Venezuelan Labor," *Monthly Review*, June 2005, pp. 73-87.
- 65 As quoted by Zachary Lown, "Life in a Stronghold of the 'Bolivarian Revolution,'" *Znet*, March 8, 2006. Available at www.zmag.org.
- 66 Perry Anderson, "The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action," in *The Incompatibles*, eds. Robin Blackburn and Alexander Cockburn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 264.
- 67 See Richard Hyman, *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction* (London: MacMillan, 1975), p. 195.

- 68 Steven Greenhouse, "White House and Unions Look for Common Ground," *New York Times*, June 3, 2001.
- 69 As of this moment (December 2001), the Canadian Labour Congress has not come out against Bush's war, although delegates to the Ontario Federation of Labour Convention in November 2001 did pass an anti-war resolution.
- 70 As quoted by Richard Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism* (London: Pluto Press, 1971), p. 10.
- 71 For a good analysis of the origins of the present retreat of American labour see Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (London: Verso Books, 1988). On the Canadian case see Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1880-1991*, 2nd. edn. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart) Ch. 7.
- 72 Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1972), pp. 206, 208, 209, 211.
- 73 See David McNally, "Globalization on Trial: Crisis and Class Struggle in East Asia" in *Rising from the Ashes?*, p. 143.
- 74 Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy* (London: Verso Books, 1997), p. 202.
- 75 Dan La Botz, *Made in Indonesia: Indonesian Workers since Suharto* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001), p. 125.
- 76 La Botz, pp. 214, 237-40.
- 77 La Botz, p. 245. Gerard Greenfield is quite right to point out the problem of middle-class activists dominating these new unions and to insist upon the necessity of rank and file membership control of these workers' organizations (Greenfield, "Organizing, Protest and Working Class Self-Activity: Reflections on East Asia" in *Socialist Register 2001*, eds. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys [London: Merlin Press, 2000] pp. 241-42). Should these unions be able to make such a transition, the student radicals who initiated them will deserve real credit for their role in helping to build an independent workers' movement. Undoubtedly the biggest problem of internal democracy exists in the SBSI whose president, Muchtar Pakpahan, despite important accomplishments, exerts a monolithic control (see La Botz, pp. 222-23).
- 78 Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001), p. 130.
- 79 Moody, p. 214; Louie, p. 131.
- 80 McNally, "Globalization on Trial," p. 142.
- 81 McNally, p. 151.
- 82 Louie, p. 135.
- 83 For the KCTU's anti-war statement (and other documents), see www.kctu.org.
- 84 See Joel Olatunde Agoi, "Business paralysed as strike in Nigeria continues," *Daily Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg, South Africa), June 9, 2000;

- and "Nigeria - General Strike," anonymous account at www.x21.org/s26/struggles/nigeria.
- 85 Gabriel Orok and others, "Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna Shut Down," *P. M. News* (Lagos), January 16, 2002; Funmi Komolafe and others, "Fuel: NLG defies FG, Begins Strike Nationwide," *Vanguard* (Lagos), January 16, 2002.
- 86 For background see Jeremy Seabrook, *In the Cities of the South: Scenes from a Developing World* (London: Verso Books, 1996), pp. 115-26, and reports on the July 2001 strike actions at www.antimperialista.com. See also Barry Bearka, "Lives Held Cheap in Bangladesh Sweatshops," *New York Times*, April 15, 2001. On the 2006 strike see "Bangladesh: Garment Workers Unite for Struggle," April 5, 2006 in the online journal *Political Affairs*.
- 87 Rohini Hensman, "Organizing Against The Odds: Women in India's Informal Sector," *Socialist Register 2001*, pp. 250-51.
- 88 Moody, pp. 217-18.
- 89 Trina Leung, "Taming the Tigers," *New Internationalist*, December 2001, p. 17.
- 90 See Moody, p. 219 and Roman and Velasco Arregui, p. 137.
- 91 On job losses in the maquiladora zones see Ginger Thompson, "Fallout of U.S. Recession Drifts South Into Mexico," *New York Times*, December 26, 2001. For background on one successful maquiladora union drive see "Kuk Dong Workers Form Union," *Against the Current* 92 (May/June 2001), p. 19. On FSCISP and radical labour in Mexico see Dan La Botz, "Mexico's Labor Movement in Transition," *Monthly Review*, June 2005.
- 92 Krishna Lalbiharie, "General Strike Rocks Colombia," *Canadian Dimension*, July/August 2001, p. 10.
- 93 Jon Jeter, "For South Africa's poor, a new power struggle," *Washington Post*, November 6, 2001; Naomi Klein, "It's not enough to bring Soweto to Rosedale," *Globe and Mail*, November 21, 2001; Mark MacKinnon, "Massive protests splinter Mandela's grand coalition," *Globe and Mail*, August 30, 2001. For a sweeping analysis of neoliberalism in post-apartheid South Africa see John Saul, "Cry for the Beloved Country," *Monthly Review*, January 2001.
- 94 David Lopez and Cynthia Feliciano, "Who Does What? California's Emerging Plural Workforce" in *Organizing Immigrants: The Challenge for Unions in Contemporary California*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 28, 25, 26.
- 95 See Miriam J. Wells, "Immigration and Unionization in the San Francisco Hotel Industry" in *Organizing Immigrants*, pp. 109-29; and Louie, p. 205.
- 96 Ruth Milkman and Kent Wong, "Organizing the Wicked City: The 1992 Southern California Drywall Strike" in *Organizing Immigrants*, pp. 169-98.
- 97 Catherine L. Fisk, Daniel J. B. Mitchell and Christopher L. Erickson, "Union Representation of Immigrant Janitors in Southern California: Economic and Legal Challenges" in *Organizing Immigrants*, pp. 202-6.
- 98 Robin D. G. Kelley, *YO' mama's disFUNKtional* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 131.
- 99 Steven Greenhouse, "Los Angeles Warms to Labor Unions as Immigrants Look to Escape Poverty," *New York Times*, April 9, 2001.

- 100 Greenhouse.
- 101 For background on these centers, see Louie, chs. 5-6; Kelley, pp. 149-50; and John Anner, ed., *Beyond Identity Politics: Emerging Social Justice Movements in Communities of Color* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1996).
- 102 Louie, p. 203.
- 103 As quoted in Vanessa Tait, *Poor Workers Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005), p. 150.
- 104 David Bacon, "Unions and the Fight for Multi-Racial Democracy," paper presented to the California Studies Conference, University of California at Berkeley, February 6, 1999.
- 105 See Tait, Ch. 4 and Sarumathi Jayaraman and Immanuel Ness, eds., *The New Urban Immigrant Workforce: Innovative Models for Labor Organizing* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), Ch. 6.
- 106 Eric Mann, "Class, Community and Empire: Toward an Anti-Imperialist Strategy for Labor" in *Rising from the Ashes?*, p. 105.
- 107 Eric Mann, "'A Race Struggle, A Class Struggle, A Women's Struggle All At Once:' Organizing On the Buses of LA," *Socialist Register 2001*, p. 267.
- 108 Ahora Now is available by subscription from Labor/Community Strategy Center, The Wiltern Center, 3780 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1200, Los Angeles, California 90010.
- 109 David Bacon, "Bus Strike Ends in Victory for Driver-Rider Alliance," *Labor Notes*, December 2000.
- 110 See Tait, pp. 145-51.
- 111 See Louise B. Simmons, *Organizing in Hard Times: Labor and Neighbourhoods in Hartford* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); and Kelley, pp. 135-37.
- 112 See www.ocap.ca.
- 113 Tait, pp. 199-200]. The resort to stripping union members of their democratic rights is a reminder of just how powerful is the threat that grassroots, multiracial organizing poses to bureaucratic business unionism.
- 114 Himani Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995), p. 33.
- 115 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), pp. 9-10.
- 116 I have not been able to do any justice to the complex issues of sexual regulation and capitalism in this book. Important studies for making sense of these issues are Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities*, rev. edn. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996); Donald Morton, ed., *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); and Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- 117 Daniel Singer, *Whose Millennium? Theirs or Ours?* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), pp. 148-49.