

CONTENTS

IN SEARCH OF CLASS

Pothik Ghosh

1-6

ORBITING FASCISM

Peter McLaren & Gregory Martin

7-19

E. P. THOMPSON

David Renton

20-24

EDITORIAL TEAM

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IN SEARCH OF CLASS

Pothik Ghosh

Ever since the Soviet iron-curtain was shredded and the Tianenmen uprising exposed the chinks in the Chinese model of socialism, a mutation, that was slowly but silently going on in the depths of the political consciousness of the Left, World War II onwards, suddenly started becoming more pronounced. Class, that historical cornerstone of proletarian politics, has been going into a kind of freeze and has acquired the status of a fetishised divinity. It has become the Holy Grail, which today attracts no more than continual lip service from the phrase-mongering communistological clergy who don the cassocks of 'revolution'.

And though this has largely been true for the Left the world over, it is here in the subcontinent that the phenomenon has, unfortunately enough, been most in evidence. Class, contrary to being a salient feature of an authentic Marxist discourse that grapples with the human being as a species in historical motion is today no more than an heirloom, meant to be prominently showcased in the museum of working-class political history.

Thus the category, which according to Althusser, had broken with its essentialised subjectivity in 'Early Marx's' Feuerbachian scheme to become a different "modality of reflection"—something that transformed material history while simultaneously being transformed by it—has once again been returning to its pre-Marxian past. Althusser (1996; 46-47) writes: "If it is true that Marx espoused a whole problematic, then his rupture with Feuerbach..., implied the adoption of a *new problematic* which even if it did integrate a certain number of the old concepts, did so into a whole which confers on them a radically new significance. I am pleased to be able to express this in an image from Greek history which Marx himself used: after serious set-backs in the War against the Persians, Themistocles advised the Athenians to leave the land and base the future of their city *on another element*—the sea. Marx's theoretical revolution was precisely to base his theory *on a new element* after liberating it from its *old element*: the element of Hegelian and Feuerbachian philosophy." (Emphases author's).

Sadly, what could be considered as one of the cardinal axioms of Marxist science has completely eluded the Indian Left, our putative communists included. Class for them is not the "*new element*" that

Marx had envisaged it to be. And if we go by the politico-ideological practices of the Indian Left in the past five decades, we discover that class in the Left's discourse has failed to retain the historical connotation that Marx had loaded it with. Today, class is no longer a dynamic social category that keeps renewing itself in a process of historical-material becoming by unlocking the critical energies immanent in every moment of historical motion. It is, ironically enough, a sociologised concept harking back to the post-Industrial Revolutionary universe of 18th-19th century Europe; a positive ontology among many others. These varying ontologies (or subjectivities), which are held together by the hierarchical rules of some sort of a social contract, into a stable and supposedly stabilising civil society, are reified moments of the process of historical becoming that are abstracted and alienated from one another, thanks to the fundamentally competitive ethic of capital. It is this ideological impulse—which permeated all the nooks and crannies of human existence with the ascendancy of capitalism—that has disrupted the non-identitarian flow of a pre-capitalist order by territorialising the various spatio-temporal moments of the flow and freezing them into identities. It is only through deterritorialisation of these separate identities and their respective forms that the non-identitarian, non-alienated whole can once again be reconstituted.

The mere adding up of these identities does not make that whole. The whole, as Hegel would have said, is more than a sum of its parts. For, the parts have to collapse into one another, and their identities consequently dissolved, for the whole to emerge. And that is precisely the kind of operation the classical Marxist idea of class is meant to perform by historicising the abstracted or reified spatio-temporal moments or identities of the non-identitarian flow. In other words, each identity has to be seen as a moment or a node in the process and thus dissolved or de-reified and made part of that process. In real terms, this implies that two or more different identities and their contradictions have to be seen as they concretely arose due to a certain

direction taken by the unfolding of history because of contingent material reasons. That is, unravel the historical-material causes behind the birth of these identities through their separation and alienation from each other—when they were merged together and had no separate names—ultimately leading to their antagonisms, hierarchies, competition and contradictions. And once this historicising operation takes place, they are dialectically collapsed into one another. Had this been limited to the realm of speculative philosophy and idealism, we could have safely concluded that the whole had once again been reconstituted. But we live in flesh and blood and in concrete history. And things here are not so simple. For, the moment this operation is over and the identities are dialectically reconciled, giving rise to what ought to have been the higher, non-identitarian whole, which holds its lower halves within itself in a sublated form, it becomes another identity struggling with its antitheses—which are not merely new contradictory identities that have emerged to compete with it, but also include lower forms, which it holds within itself, and which now seek to struggle against it, too. As a result, this synthesis, this supposed whole, becomes another new form or identity in the jungle of forms or identities.

This historicising process, therefore, has to go on, almost forever. Certainly, as long as the capitalist mode of production survives. And it can halt at its own peril in a Marxological telos of either a 'fully-formed' communist party or a 'post-revolutionary' society that are forever. One has to keep in mind the fact that as long as the capitalist mode of production lives; all historicising endeavours will finally end up creating newer and newer identities. For, the fundamental impulse of capitalism is competition, which can only go on by stagnating the non-identitarian process of becoming into congealed identities that are alienated parts of the whole; or abstracted moments in the process of becoming. Thus all identities, subjectivities or forms need to be continuously critiqued, in a discursive ensemble of theory and practice. And this continuous critique, for a Marxist, unfolds by

constantly trying to go beyond the positive. That is, the revolutionary gaze of Marxism has to always delve into the heart of a subjectivity or identity and see not what it shows but what it conceals! It has to always try and transcend the metaphysical present—the a priori identities—by travelling through and heightening their apparent contradictions, only to dissolve them into the historical process from which they were abstracted or reified. This reification of subjectivities or identities can actually be likened to the process of forgetting. An identity forgets, kind of, the process from which it arose. A revolutionary Marxist's task is to make it remember its history and rid itself of its alienation and thus its *identified* existence. This *negative dialectics* is what class-consciousness, according to Marx, is all about.

In the absence or slackening of such consciousness or praxis, history is transformed into a static entity, which is then recognised as such by the false consciousness of positive bourgeois existence that has a dialectical co-determining relationship with what Althusser called the ideological state apparatuses. As a consequence, the bourgeois social order, civil society in respectable parlance of the day, is premised on this synchronising and reifying impulse of competitive and, thus, hierarchical capitalism. This is essential to the existence, continuance, expansion and intensification of capitalist processes. In short, the social formation known as the civil society—a hierarchical organisation of various subjectivities—is basically nothing more than a kind of concatenation of production relations essential and intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production. And these production relations, according to Althusser, have to be reproduced if capitalism has to survive. He (1971:132-133) writes: “However, it is not enough to ensure for labour power the material conditions of its reproduction if it is to be reproduced as labour power. I have said that the available labour power must be ‘competent’, i.e. suitable to be set to work in the complex system of the process of production. The development of the productive forces and the type of unity historically

constitutive of the productive forces at a given moment produce the result that the labour power has to be (diversely) skilled and therefore reproduced as such. Diversely: according to the requirements of the socio-technical division of labour, its different ‘jobs’ and ‘posts’....

“To put it more scientifically, I shall say that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words’....

“The reproduction of labour power thus reveals as its *sine qua non* not only the reproduction of its ‘skills’ but also the reproduction of its subjection to the ruling ideology or of the ‘practice’ of that ideology, with the proviso that it is not enough to say ‘not only but also’, for it is clear that *it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power.*” (Emphases author’s.)

But the constitution of the social formation and the ideological apparatuses, which perpetuate it while simultaneously being its parts, are intimately linked to the bourgeois mode of production. As a result, any revolutionary subjectivity, the moment it loses its negative-critical continuity, is deprived of its radical sting and is transformed into a reified, ideologised subjectivity that fits into the civil society and becomes its part. In fact, that is how capital has often adapted to the critique of revolutionary praxis, by reifying the revolutionary process into a ‘revolutionary’ subjectivity. And history testifies how this has contaminated many effective revolutionary endeavours. Stalin’s USSR, China’s current model of market socialism and the sorry state of affairs as far as the Indian Left goes are but a few instances of the ideologising power of capitalism.

This is the lesson that Marx, by pointing to the principal contradiction between capital and labour, intended to impart. And the category of class that he employed is meant to perform precisely that function: discerning the historical-material processes from which contradictory and competing identities are abstracted and in the same revolutionary subjective moment collapse them dialectically to inject motion back into “pre-history” (history with a false consciousness) and transform it into “real history” of nonidentitarian becoming, where the reign of exchange value is replaced by the age of use value. Marx, however, was a product of his times—19th century industrial Europe—and obviously his idea of class was delimited by his history. Fredric Jameson (1996:6) hits the nail on its head when he writes: “All science...projects not just ideology but a host of possible ideologies, and this is to be understood in a positive sense: ideology as the working theory of a specific practice, the latter’s ‘philosophy’ as it were, and the ensemble of values and visions that mobilise it and lend it an ethic and a politics (and an aesthetic as well). The various Marxisms—for there are many of them, and famously incompatible with one another—are just that: the local ideologies of Marxian science in history and in concrete historical situations, which set not merely their priorities but also their limits.”

And this ought to have applied to Marx’s Marxism before anybody else’s. It ought to have enabled the bearers of his legacy to see that the historical correlate of class for Marx was the capitalist and the worker. In such a scenario, it would be fundamentally and gravely erroneous to read him, particularly his magnum opus *The Capital*, only historically. That fallacy, nevertheless, has time and again wormed its way into the heart and soul of Marxian revolutionary theory and practice. In fact, what has to be extracted from Marx and his historical, and ideological, concept of class is not merely its historicity, but something much more crucial: its logicity that is axiomatic and, therefore, constitutes it as the science of historical materialism.

The failure of the Indian left on that count compels it to envisage class, even now, in the same Industrial Revolutionary terms in which Marx had formulated it. As if there has been no intensification of capitalist processes since Marx, and more formal and real subsumptive occurrences have not taken place with capital’s penetration into zones that were still non-commodified in Marx’s day. So, class for the Indian Left has actually become no more than a sociological descriptor of the western society in the heyday of Industrial Revolution. Unsurprisingly, therefore, working class as envisaged by the Indian Left is an economic, worker subjectivity that fits perfectly well into the capitalist social formation and serves it fine. Its only contribution to working-class struggles has been to nurture an entrenched labour aristocracy. Marx (1976: 617) states in his ninth thesis on Feuerbach: “The highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society.” So, if the subjectivity of the working class, as envisaged by Marx in a certain historical frame, is not seen as arising from its “sensuous experience”, which in turn is linked to its “practical activity”, it will fail to historically transform itself and become a reified component of the civil society.

It is this debility of the Left that has led to the liquidationist canker, which is slowly gnawing away at its revolutionary soul. As a result, class, for the Indian Left, has become a piece of immovable liability that most of them secretly desire would disappear, so that they can then proceed to conduct their anti-systemic politics of ‘real democratisation’ with no qualms. It has been entirely due to the Left’s inability to see identity-formation—race, caste, or community—and their concomitant politics in terms of capitalist subsumption and its competitive ethic that has led them to confused vacillation between what they understand as class politics and various types of ‘democratising’ identity politics. This confusion, which afflicted the Left not merely here, but all over the world,

sometime ago, has been responsible for the rise of the twin beasts of postmodernism and post-Marxism.

Once the Marxists failed to establish a connection between the hardening of diffused and syncretistic pre-capitalist identities into competing and struggling interest groups and the penetration of capital into non-commodified zones, the petty-bourgeois radicals of yore now donning the new regalia of post-Marxism and postmodernism took over and declared that class was an identity that had become redundant in an era of more pressing identity struggles.

In India, such 'pomo' and 'po-ma' tendencies are articulated by the Subaltern Studies collective, as also by "neo-traditionalists" like Ashis Nandy. Their desire, not very different from many modernists who appeared on the European horizon during and after 1848, is to rediscover our unalienated, non-commodified, pre-modern pasts that were thoroughly marginalised, if not destroyed, by modernity borne on the wings of big capital. Sample this excerpt from Nandy (1987: xvii): "...modernity is neither the endstate of all cultures nor the final word in institutional creativity. Howsoever formidable and permanent the edifices of the modern world may appear today, the other self recognises, one day there will have to be post-modern societies and a post-modern consciousness, and those societies and that consciousness may choose to build not so much upon modernity as on the traditions of the non-modern or pre-modern world." What they don't realise is that their discourses of non-alienation and their politics of anti-capitalism and critique of modernity are articulated by the competitive ethic of capitalism itself. Their non-commodified, pre-modern *Weltanschauung* is a subjectivity that has to compete with and struggle against capitalism, commodification and modernity. In that sense, their whole discourse, despite its purported critique of modernity, is *modern*.

And such ideological discourses share a paradigm not merely with the apparently progressive identity politics articulated by

Gandhians and sundry civil rights activists like Medha Patkar, Vandana Shiva, et al, but also with casteist forces like the BSP and SP, and even the communal fascists of the Sangh parivar. Not surprisingly, varying and often mutually oppositional political forces—the tribal outfits in the Northeast and ethno-religious separatists of Kashmir—inhabit the same ideological space.

The Left parties, not knowing what to do in such a scenario, have swung wildly between berating such "anti-class" tendencies and then adopting their piecemeal politics by attaching labels like the 'People's Democratic Revolution', the 'National Democratic Revolution' and the 'New Democratic Revolution' on to them. They have often enough even aligned with them. In fact, various Marxist-Leninist outfits have limited themselves to giving leadership to tribal identity politics in Bastar, Telangana, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Orissa. The entente of the mainstream Left—the CPI and the CPI (M)—with caste political forces of Laloo Prasad Yadav and Mulayam against the Hindutva of the Sangh parivar is only an indication of the Fascist conjuncture in which we are and the complete ideological blindness of the Left to the problem. This blindness manifests in many ways. The most notable has been the Left's recent ambivalence on the Islamist ummah of Osama bin Laden vis-à-vis the imperialist US. Probably, the various Left parties vest their anti-imperialist hope in Al Qaeda supremo. An Indian Marxist economist has said as much. The CPI-ML (New Democracy) has gone to the extent of upholding Saddam Hussein against the Bush-Blair imperialist phalanx, and making a hero out of this anti-Marxist, Baathist criminal. Little do they realise that nation-states can hardly be units of anti-imperialism and that, in fact, the natural outcome of free competition among nation-states is monopoly capitalism, which in politico-ideological terms means imperialism.

The struggle against imperialism has to be finally a struggle against capitalism in its various forms—both that of Bush and Blair, as also that of Saddam and Bin Laden. The hegemony of global

capitalism has to be critiqued simultaneously with the *swadeshiism*¹ of the fascists and custodians of the national capital who uphold the virtues of the Indian nation-state apparently against global capitalist onslaughts from the West. And the communal Hindutva of the Sangh has to be resisted as much as the kulak-based caste identity politics of Laloo or petty-bourgeois politics of Dalitism a la Mayawati.

In short, the Indian Marxists will have to become sensitive to the dialectical linkages between capitalism and petty-bourgeois anti-capitalism. For, didn't Henri Lefebvre (1991) say that Fascism was a mystification of the revolution? Petty-bourgeois opposition to the alienation wrought by capital's penetration into non-commodified areas and zones of simple commodity production is what gives rise to Fascism, because petty bourgeois identities of caste, community, race, language and region are, as we have seen before, the result of capitalist competition and subsumption. They in their reified anti-capitalism and for their supposed politics of non-alienation enable capital accumulation to overcome its crisis by expropriative extraction of surplus value.

The Indian Marxists, if they really wish to fight Fascism—its spectre looms large over the subcontinent—will have to realise fast enough that Marx's notion of class has to be made historical through what John S. Saul (2003) calls "classifying of difference". This means that the subjectivity of class has to continuously change and it can do so by constantly and dialectically reconciling the identity-based differences that will keep cropping up as long as there is even a minute trace of capitalism left in the world. Therefore, in the ultimate analysis, this classifying of difference is nothing else but a call to permanent revolution!

¹Swadeshiism is an idea that was originally conceived and used by Mahatma Gandhi during the Indian freedom struggle. It was meant to champion the cause of products, particularly cloth produced by weavers in India, and the boycott of British goods. It has now been adopted by a wing of the RSS—the Swadeshi Jagran Manch—to fight 'western imperialism'.

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ORBITING FASCISM: THE UNITED STATES, THE 'BIG LIE', AND THE POLITICS OF EMPIRE

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Following the outbreak of World War II, Trotsky presciently remarked that the reactionary character of imperialism was expressed most clearly by its organic descent into fascism. Faced with internal economic stagnation and decay, those 'civilized hyenas' (Lenin's term) who pompously ride in the saddle of the beast of capital seek to delay its demise by creating conditions for fascism and imperialist war to flourish. How long can capital continue to sustain itself, even as the innocents of entire nations are sacrificed to its unending gluttony for profits, is difficult to predict. But the outcome is not. Capital, in this degenerate and imperialist phase, is no longer concerned with being an internal progressive force—far from it. Indeed, out of absolute necessity, capital becomes a regressive force, a weapon of subjugation, drawing the whole world into its shadowy orbit of deceit and conquest. Likewise, grappling with a sharpening and deepening social crisis, the U.S. ruling class through its supporting state apparatus is today unleashing a raging torrent of reactionary violence, repression, terror and death to create the necessary conditions for its own regeneration. Brandishing its weapons of mass destruction, the wartime U.S. imperialist state led by the Bush gang has emerged as an indispensable guarantor of 'super-profits' for its own wild-eyed imperialist bourgeoisie. Yet, the imperial reach of the U.S. differs from that of Britain a century ago in that the U.S. does not practice colonialism but relies on dependent and satellite states, resorting to armed intervention when the natives get restless and start refusing to

buckle down. Whereas the British empire was based on a singularly British purpose, the U.S. is based on a universalist conviction that the rest of the world should follow its example of free market capitalist democracy (Hobsbawm, 2003). Long before Bush W. took power in January 2001, the present architects of U.S. foreign policy at the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), recognised the need to maintain the dominant position of U.S. capitalism by advancing such American values through a policy of 'peace through strength.' But the brute reality is that 'one imperialist state can only expand its power at the expense of another' and what is emerging today is not 'security' or 'world peace' but new imperialist centres of rivalry as evidenced by the two-day summit that included Russia, France and Germany in Russia on 11-12 April 2003 (Socialist Democracy, 2002).

Despite the growth of a gigantic, parasitic and militaristic state at the expense of individual and group freedoms, we really cannot talk about fascism in the U.S. the same way that Trotsky referred to the term. At the same time, the conditions that foster fascism cannot be ignored here on U.S. soil, especially considering the scary success of the Bush gang and its propaganda campaign, which has led people to forget the actual conditions that make its emergence and victory possible. Forgotten are the transnationals who are flooding the market with cheap and subsidised food and forcing millions of farmers into bankruptcy, including thousands per week in the U.S. Forgotten

are the million of urban homeless and unemployed and those cannot afford medical insurance. Forgotten is the environmental degradation in the Homeland, and the toxic waste we are dumping not just on Native American lands but also exporting to developing countries as the solution. Forgotten is California's energy crisis that was stage-managed by Kenny Boy Lay, the darling of Bush W., who still runs free even after the collapse of his company, Enron.

All of the above is an old and stale story for 'globalisation' theorists, perhaps even for Marxist experts who specialise in the declining rate of profit and capital's effort to deal with it in a post-Keynesian era. But it is rendered exceptional by the sheer scale of barbarity and cruelty being waged against humanity and the planet. What matters here is that without the counterweight of the former Soviet Union, the U.S., under the Republicans and the 'lesser-evil' Democrats, has risen rapidly to the top of the imperialist pack and is acting like the world's bullyboy. This is expressed in perfect clarity by the brutal military offensive that followed the events of September 11, when a still unproven force destroyed the World Trade Center and damaged the Pentagon. Now there was an excuse to crush, unforgivingly the remnants of any progressive consensus that survived the fight with its old adversary, the Soviet bogeyman. Now neoliberalism could be unleashed unopposed by any superpower. Now the true enemy—the international working class—can be further fractured and destroyed. The tragedy of 9.11 catapulted infamously the unpopular Bush/Cheney/Scalia/Thomas rightwing that rode into power by stealing the 2000 U.S. election, onto the stage of world history (Program Demand Group, 2003). Seizing upon the fear and sympathy afforded by September 11, Bush & Co. declared an open-ended 'War on Terrorism,' with the right to wage war on any perceived enemy, domestic or foreign, for any reason, at anytime, and by any means – including nuclear weapons. With a jaw-jutting and arrogant sneer, Bush declared an ultimatum to the world: "You are either with us or for the terrorists".

The story we are being told here, in the home citadel of U.S. imperialism, is that this unapologetic Crusade, which is being waged on a number of different fronts (e.g., Afghanistan, Columbia, Iraq, the Philippines and United States), is all about protecting 'our way of life' and defending the 'free world' from evildoers (The Editors, 2002). But beneath this overblown rhetoric lurks what Dr. Joseph Goebbels, the notorious Nazi propaganda chief, called the art of the 'Big Lie.' The logic of the 'Big Lie' is that people will accept a lie as truth if it is big enough and is told often enough by authoritative sources. Whereas Goebbels' lie laid the foundations for the Holocaust, the Bush regime is manipulating the U.S. population into an epoch of imperialist war that threatens to kill millions of world's poorest people. To take just one glaring example, before the invasion of Iraq, the Secretary of State presented evidence from the CIA and U.S. intelligence community to the United Nations Security Council of Iraq's alleged 'Weapons of Mass Destruction.' The so-called 'clear proof' of this stockpile was calculated to create public support for a war, deemed in violation of international law. Yet, not a single chemical, biological or nuclear weapon has been found in its bloody aftermath. But wait: Poll after poll reveals that President Bush is not in any political danger. Over 70 percent of Americans, content with an increased sense of security and a low U.S. casualty count 'victory,' now believe that the war was justified regardless.

Suffice to say, the 24-hour-a-day 'No Spin Zone' ideological manipulation and monopolisation techniques of the imperialist rulers and their lackeys in the corporate media (e.g., FOX News) have played a critical role in getting people to identify with ideas that are not objectively in their interests (e.g., nationalism, racism and war). Echoing the rise of fascism in Germany, the Bush regime and its bourgeois apologists are using ultra-nationalist propaganda to create 'public opinion.' Based on generalised fear (e.g., sudden 'Fatherland' terror alerts, stories about duct tape) and programmed ignorance (e.g., formalised schooling

and monopoly control over content in the print and mass electronic media), the imperialist's propaganda machine seeks to eliminate dissent in the form of dialectical thinking and critical dialogue by equating it with terrorism. As we have seen, in this claustrophobic, flag-saluting world, a narrow form of patriotism is being used by a cabal of right wingers including media pundits, religious fundamentalists and government officials to witch hunt and brand people who express opinions critical of U.S. policy as unpatriotic, anti-American, and even as traitors who give 'aid and comfort' to the enemy. Steve Rendall (2003) reports in *Extra!* that in a recent tirade, radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh could barely hide his disdain for antiwar demonstrators, 'I want to say something about these anti-war demonstrators. No, let's not mince words, let's call them what they are: anti-American demonstrators' (p. 25). For his part, Bill O'Reilly (Hart, 2003, p. 22), host of Fox's *The O'Reilly Factor*, put it like this:

Once the war against Saddam begins, we expect every American to support our military, and if they can't do that, to shut up. Americans, and indeed our allies, who actively work against our military once the war is underway will be considered enemies of the state by me. Just fair warning to you, Barbara Streisand, and others who see the world as you do.

Building upon this ultra right-wing sentiment, popular talk show host, Michael Savage of MSNBC, even called for the restoration of the Sedition Act to silence dissent (Rendall, 2003, p. 26). Sean Penn has to pay around \$125,000 to take out a full page anti-Bush ad in the *New York Times*, and that is what it costs now to see dissent appear in the mainstream press. It should not surprise anyone that the aim of this ideological lockdown on dissent is to create discipline and support for the totalising ambitions (e.g., unlimited power, expansionism, military aggression) of the Bush administration and its Likudite advisors from the Project for the New American Century (PNAC),

Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Jeb Bush, William Bennett, Francis Fukuyama, Dan Quale and the authors of the September 2002 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America.' The U.S. media is so effective that, according to a *New York Times*/CBS News Survey, 42 per cent of the American public believes that Saddam Hussein was directly responsible for the attacks of September 11 and that 55 per cent of American's believe that Saddam directly supported al Qaida. Yet, the crucial point is that such understandings do not emerge spontaneously, like mushrooms, out of the ideological superstructure but are rather deliberately constructed by the capitalist class so that it can pursue its own narrow interests, albeit popularised by the ideological apparatus (schools, media) as being in the general interest of 'all Americans.'

Perhaps the most pathetic lie used to mobilise patriotic solidarity for U.S. warfare and sacrifice is the shop-worn slogan 'Support Our Troops.' As was the case in Vietnam, working-class youth are fighting and dying in a war that does not serve their interests (or recognise their sexuality), let alone the Iraqis. Aside from the physical injuries, psychological trauma and other long-term health effects that these young soldiers will undoubtedly suffer, what kind of hellish fate awaits upon their return? The whole country is a mess, with the ever-growing ranks of the malingering poor being cast into the pit of pauperism, with barely enough food to eat. Not only this but Fred Samia (2003), a Vietnam Vet awarded 7 decorations including the Purple Heart, reports the difference between being 'exalted' and 'cajoled' by recruiters and politicians during the war and his return to indifference and neglect. His experience is not unique with the plaintive pleas of Vietnam vets for help with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and Agent-Orange-caused illness denied for years by the Pentagon, much the same way the Department of Defense has dismissed Gulf War vet's complaints of depleted uranium, biological and chemical related illnesses (Samia, 2003). For thousands of veterans, these wars are never over and continue to take lives. Do not forget,

Vietnam War vets not only have the greatest percentages of homelessness (the equivalent of 17 infantry divisions on the streets every night), substance abuse and divorce but also, tragically, a suicide rate that has eclipsed in total the number of those who died in actual combat. Tellingly, the Bush administration cut billions from veterans' benefits the same day the illegal invasion of Iraq began but did not hesitate to subsidise the U.S. auto industry by supporting fat tax breaks for purchasers of high-profit, gas-guzzling SUVs and light trucks.

We repudiate this jingoistic and craven form of patriotism, along with its ubiquitous displays of lapel pins, flags, bumper stickers, tee shirts and slogans such as 'United We Stand.' This propaganda campaign is aimed at convincing the broad masses of people to submit to policies that are reducing their civil liberties, including the right to free speech. Of course, the standard line from the bourgeoisie is that the situation in the Homeland—and by imperial extension—the world, is different following the events of September 11. Yet, this claim is not borne out by the facts. September 11 has not stopped police brutality and murder by racist cops, the building of more jails than schools, attacks on affirmative action, Bible Belt bigotry against gays, poverty, job and food 'insecurity,' sexism, animal slavery and slaughter or the flawed and barbaric system of capital punishment. Take for example the recent killing of Alberta Spruill, a quiet church going 57-year old black woman living in Harlem, under the pretence of fighting the 'war on drugs.' Spruill, a proud union member of DC 37 Local 1549, was preparing for work at 6 a.m. when NYC police, acting on a 'tip' and using a 'no knock' search warrant, set off a deafening concussion grenade in her apartment. After the cops launched an all-out Gestapo-style commando raid, Spruill breathlessly explained that she had a serious heart condition but was dragged out of her home and hand-cuffed anyway before being taken to the hospital, where she was pronounced dead upon arrival an hour and a half later (The NorthStar News Staff, 2003). Make no mistake about it, this outrage was not a 'tragic mistake' or an 'isolated incident.' On the contrary,

the use of excessive and deadly force is not a new phenomenon in the U.S. and Spruill's name must be added to the long and growing list of Black, indigenous and immigrant victims who have lost their lives through similar encounters with racist cops, including Amadou Diallo, an example of 'legal lynching,' after the police officers who shot him to death were acquitted in February 2000.

Spruill's death is reflective of the Shock and Awe terror campaign being waged daily in inner-city neighbourhoods all across the U.S., which must be understood as a domestic extension of the imperialist's invasion and colonial occupation of Iraq. At the very heart of this is the fact that for the past 25 years, including the period in which Reagan was ranting about an 'evil' Soviet empire, the U.S. has been the world's most aggressive jailer, with a greater proportion of its population in prison than any other country including Communist China—and it is growing, right alongside the prison-industrial complex (Goldberg & Evans, 2002; The Economist, 2002; The Thistle, 2000). A search for a substantive comparison would take us back to the Stalinist era, when the Soviet Union was under attack from the Nazis. To find a comparison with U.S. imprisonment of black people, one has to look to apartheid South Africa before Mandela became President. It is not a secret that capitalism thrives on divide and conquest strategies and tactics, and when in crisis it ratchets up racism and oppression. But the consequences always have a scale effect and with 'failing' schools, no jobs and no hope, youth in America's segregated inner-city communities are not only being sent to jail in record numbers but are also dying like flies on the blood-soaked streets. In Los Angeles, where the political leadership of much of the black left such as the Black Panthers was assassinated during the 1960s, gang violence has reached epidemic proportions, with over 50 people killed a month, an average higher than in the Palestinian occupied territories (Rampell, 2003, p. 9). When drive-by shootings are not claiming the lives of America's inner-city youth, the toxic emissions from industrial plants surely will. A 2001 Harvard School of Public Health study estimates that there are 2,800

asthma attacks, 500 emergency room visits and 41 preventative deaths a year due to carbon dioxide emissions and high levels of mercury that are poisoning the water. The responsibility for this dangerous assault on human health has been traced directly to Crawford & Fisk coal burning electrical power plants in Chicago, owned by Edison International's Midwest Generation. Chicago's Mayor Daley and the city's Department of the Environment have so far opposed legislation that would clean up most of the pollution generated by Crawford & Fisk plants (News & Letters, June, 2003).

So we should not pretend in the aftermath of September 11 that 'everything has changed' when the state is continuing to obstruct the dispensing of justice for its citizens at home, even as it wages multiple and enduring wars of 'justice' and 'liberation' abroad. If anything, the passage of the USA Patriot Act last year by Congress together with the recent slew of executive orders, mandates and Orwellian security measures enacted by Bush, Ashcroft and Co., indicates that we have entered a reactionary period of totalitarian rule, where every thought and activity is subject to pre-emptive action. Authorised by the draconian Patriot Act, the newly created Department of Homeland Security along with its secret thought police now has the right to wiretap anyone's phone it wants without a court order, to search any home without a warrant, to hold anyone in jail for 30 days or more without filing any charges (with no phone call 'privileges') and to secretly monitor people's finances, purchases, library or internet use with sophisticated electronic and computer eavesdropping equipment. It has even been reported in the press (Sniffen, 2003) that the Pentagon, through the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency or DARPA, is now soliciting bids to develop a digital super diary, known as Lifelog, that 'records heartbeats, travel, Internet chats, everything a person does.' All of this domestic turmoil is occurring at a time when the U.S. is promising the Iraq people that it will build up the infrastructure of Iraq—schools, hospitals, educational institutions—so that it can give the Iraq

people what it has been unable to give its own citizens.

Every American should be gravely concerned about the erosion of civil rights in the United States, especially those prepared to speak out against this bloodthirsty system. In the beginning, the government was content to set its sights disproportionately upon immigrants and people of colour, especially Muslims, as evidenced by the Department of Homeland Security's plan called 'Operation Liberty Shield,' enacted as bombs rained down on Iraq. Targeting precisely the kind of people who have been victims of regimes that the U.S. was formerly allied with in the past but has now vociferously singled out for condemnation, Operation Liberty Shield authorised immigration officials to detain virtually all asylum seekers from a group of 33 countries including Iraq, Iran, Sudan and Somalia (Amnesty International, 2003). But right now, such repressive measures are quickly being integrated and expanded throughout the entire American judicial system, sharply undermining the democratic rights of U.S. citizens and non-citizens alike. How far is the government prepared to go? The drafting of the 'Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003,' dubbed 'Patriot Act II,' threatens to expand the authority of the government's secret police by throwing out a whole set of Constitutional protections under the pretence of 'fighting terrorism.' Amongst other things, Cohen (2003) reports that this draft legislation proposes to empower the Department of Justice to compile a DNA database of 'suspected terrorists' who associate with 'suspected groups' and even to 'expatriate' a U.S. citizen 'if, with the intent to relinquish his nationality, he becomes a member of, or provides material support to, a group that the United States has designated as a 'terrorist organization'" (p. 9). The goal of the Bush administration is to exercise total information control through the consolidation of the corporate media owned by the military industrial complex. Bush's road map to resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an attempt to placate the Arab world after the exercise of Bush's imperial ambitions and to deflect attention away from his

war against the Homeland's poor, already imposed on the Palestinians, effectively attempting to institutionalise the occupation by the Israeli settler state. Few people are fooled, including a large segment of Israel's own population who agree that the Bush roadmap favours Israel.

Standing silently backstage, the Bush gang is able to exercise the full power of the state to crush every adversary, including organised labour, just like the Nazis did when they formed the government. What this signals is that the ruling class has dispensed with all pretence to bourgeois democracy. Strangely enough, advocates of free-trade and competition such as Bush Jr. have sought to differentiate U.S. capitalism from single-party 'dictatorships' and all sorts of 'totalitarian' regimes, with special attention now turned toward Cuba, where U.S. officials have stepped up their attempt to destabilise the Castro government by increasing the funding of 'dissidents' on the island as well as ruthless terrorist groups of Cuban expatriates who walk the streets of Miami with impunity, and by practically eliminating the visa program for Cuban emigrants wishing to leave (The Editors, 2002). Of course Bush's war against 'totalitarianism' is helped along by leading U.S. intellectuals such as Susan Sontag, who accused Columbian Nobel Prize winning novelist, Gabriel Garcia Marques of lacking integrity and being an apologist of Cuban terrorism. Yet, with the building of this modern Gestapo-like 'security state,' what is exposed is a 'Dictatorship of Capital,' with the Bush regime operating by command rather than by openness and full-fledged participation. By extension, the concept of liberty and freedom for all is turned on its head, with ordinary working people 'freed' from the burden of secure employment, pensions, affordable housing, health care and civil rights, whilst the ruling class rakes in grotesque amounts of money with no limit, regulation or legal obstruction. The plain fact is that the state, which stands "*above* society," is committed to the class rule of the bourgeoisie and that imperialist wars are fought solely to advance only the interests of the capitalist class (Lenin, 1965, p. 9).

Although this stage-managed shift meshes perfectly with the hegemonic plans of the Bush gang, it is not a question of 'ethics' or 'policy' but of historical and economic necessity (The Editors, 2002). Confronted with a crisis of overproduction, U.S. monopoly capital must override the remnants left of bourgeois democracy in order to re-establish conditions of profitability. Officially, the U.S. fell into recession in March 2001 and has been mired in slow growth ever since and so the state is acting in the immediate interests of its own home-based corporations to produce a loyal and compliant labour force ready to super-exploit. As we have seen, the preference of the ruling class through its neo-liberal agenda is to construct a world with no legal or political barriers to monopoly and finance capital, ensuring its competitive advantage and dominance in the world economy. Domestically, this means doing away with 'old fashioned' democratic freedoms (e.g., individual civil rights and liberties) that were once regarded as necessary to the development of capitalism at a time when Bretton Woods had divided up the world at the behest of the 'victors' of WWII. In constructing such a landscape, the government can flagrantly ignore the wishes of a significant minority of people. Indeed, armed with a vastly expanded police state apparatus, the government has proven its willingness to use the external 'international crisis' as an excuse to break any domestic opposition, under the pretence of national security. Witness the use of militaristic tactics at recent antiwar events such as when riot-equipped police hurled concussion grenades and fired wooden bullets and 'sting bags,' which send out a spray of BB-sized rubber pellets and a cloud of gas, to terrorise and injure anti-war protestors and longshoremen at the Oakland docks (Mendoza, 2003).

As for the Democratic Party, whose views now differ from the Republicans more today in degree than in kind, if you take into consideration their longstanding and egregious loyalty to the military industrial complex, the market economy, and Israel's repression of the Palestinians, its acquiescence to the war in Iraq brings its 'secret

alliance' with the ruling class out into the open. In the past, the Democratic Party has situated itself as a viable political alternative to the Republican Party through its advocacy of 'humanist' capitalistic reforms on a whole range of issues such as abortion, education, welfare and civil rights. But lest we forget, the spotlight was already on Clinton's globalisation strategy (e.g., the Battle for Seattle) and its cruelties long before Bush came to power (Program Demand Group, 2002). In fact, under Clinton/Gore, the U.S. took a greater share of control over NATO, the IMF, and the World Bank as instruments of ruling class hegemony. Additionally, Clinton was responsible for driving down the standard of living for U.S. workers by signing the welfare reform act in 1996, which forced welfare recipients, mostly women of colour with dependent children, into low paying, dead-end jobs that provide no benefits such as childcare or healthcare. Aside from this slave-labour/union-busting measure, Clinton also paved the way for the garrison police state that Bush, Ashcroft and Co., are now gleefully fortifying, by signing into law the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty and Antiterrorism Act in 1996. This deadly piece of 'tough on crime' legislation gutted the writ *habeas corpus*, which has existed for centuries, by eliminating federal constitutional review of state death penalty cases, and leading to a tripling of the rate of executions. It also authorised the government to deport immigrants based on secret evidence and made it illegal for anyone to support even the lawful activities of an organisation labelled 'terrorist' by the State Department (Parkin, 1999).

All this continuity, encapsulated during the 2001 mid-term elections with the bi-partisan hysteria over the 'War on Terrorism,' underscores the reality that electoral politics will never be the basis of social change. Not only was the Democratic Party silent about the dramatic rollback of democratic rights and the whole rotten system of corporate corruption exposed by the collapse of Enron and the telecommunications industry (which amounted to the theft of millions of dollars of working people's pensions), it also offered support

for the imperialist war in Iraq. From the outset, the Democratic Party did not oppose this predatory war in principle, with establishment liberals such as Ted Kennedy only wanting a larger coalition of allies to attack Iraq, whilst just about every other Democratic such as Majority Whip Tom Daschle, gripped by electoral fear and bourgeois patriotism, adopted a bi-partisan stance of 'unity' to protect the capitalist's interests, albeit by advocating a speedy war of last resort (with fig leaf cover provided by the UN) that minimised U.S. casualties. This 'unity' has an objective class basis: it is founded on the fact that both major parties share the same economic interests. The Democratic Party operatives, along with their think tanks and NGO groups, also played a prominent role in weakening the anti-war movement, especially in attacking the ANSWER coalition for being led by the World Worker's Party, and red-baiting the anti-war movement in general. Not surprisingly, Howard Dean and Dennis Kucinich, the strongest rabble-rousing leaders of the anti-war opposition amongst the Democratic candidates for President during the 2004 elections, who give voice to economic despair, fail to recognise that a truly democratic 'peace' and hope for equality is impossible without overthrowing capital. Whereas the Republicans pander to the ruling elite, the Democrats set themselves as defenders of the middle-class. In reality, the middle-class is 'an ideological illusion' that is invented to obscure the fact that we are all wage earners (Ebert & Zavarzadeh, 2003). As Marx said in *Capital* Vol. 3, middle and transitional levels of social differences always conceal the boundaries of classes. They do this 'in order to give ideological stability to the economically insecure and unstable life under capitalism' (Ebert & Zavarzadeh, 2003). If there is any doubt about where the allegiance of the Democratic Party lies, consider the bi-partisan support to imperialist war when, on April 4, the House voted 414-12 while the Senate voted 99-0 to approve the additional 75 billion requested for the military budget. The total amount spent on militarism by the U.S. nearly exceeds that spent by the other 191 countries in the world combined.

One of the deepest and important lessons of the 2000 election was that the electoral system 'stealthily pushes aside the poor' and is 'sufficiently restricted to exclude the lower stratum of the proletariat proper' (Lenin, 1965, p. 105). In the run-up to the elections, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Bush the Lesser's brother, and Secretary of State Katherine Harris, who oversaw state elections, hired a private contractor called Database to purge felons from voter rolls (Pierre, 2001). The Democratic Party refused to fight this issue on principle, when the spineless vice-presidential candidate Joe Lieberman caved into mounting pressure and argued that the Democratic Party should stop making a fuss. As in several other U.S. states, Florida law prevents ex-felons from voting. In Florida, this means that 31 percent of all Black men are barred from voting, a state in which Al Gore received more than 90 percent of the black vote. Yet, if this is not disturbing enough, Database botched the felon purge by removing the names of thousands of 'probable felons,' (which were really registered voters who had never committed a crime) along with thousands of eligible voters who had only committed misdemeanours. This is capitalist democracy. For those who have been in a cryogenic deep freeze, what this all exposes is the illusion of the U.S. electoral system, which is booby-trapped to spike class struggle with the Democratic Party acting as a Trojan Horse.

Closely related to this, the glum and muddled leaders of organised labour are engaged in phoney opposition to the war in Iraq, criticising Bush's plans on the basis that he did not build an international coalition similar to one his father led against Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War, killing an estimated 150,000 Iraqis. This deplorable position, adopted by the AFL-CIO, the nation's premier labour organisation should come as little surprise, given its unwavering support for past imperialist wars. Despite a lame call for more open debate about the war, AFL-CIO president John Sweeny has clearly betrothed his heart to the Prince of Darkness, George Bush, our Commander-and-Chief, when he labels Iraq a 'global terrorist threat' and asserts, "America certainly has the right to act

unilaterally if we need to do so to protect our national interests." This explicit statement of endorsement is shameful and unprincipled given that the Bush administration has brazenly used the so-called war on terrorism as an excuse to advance corporate interests under the cover of 'national security' by repeatedly attacking workers (Walker, 2002). A good illustration of our argument would be Bush's deployment of the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act during the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) employer lockout at 29 West Coast ports to force International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union (ILWU) workers into compulsory arbitration (Kelber, 2002).

As if that is not dire enough, the Bush gang is sharing the spoils of imperialist war with companies that have close ties to the Republican Party, including the biggest contract so far to Halliburton, a company formerly run by Mr. Cheney, the infamous contract with Betchel to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, the scandalous, no-bid contract for cell phone service in Iraq to the already bankrupt World Com, and the contract with the union-busting Stevedoring Services of America, the lead company fighting the ILWU on the West Coast docks, for operating the port of Umm Qsar in Iraq, all offering high profits worth billions of dollars (Teather, 2003). This warped tale of justice is accented by the fact that the U.S. government is subsidising companies with massive bailouts and tax cuts even as Congress passes a law to prevent individuals from getting out of debt through personal bankruptcy. This buttressing of the rate of profit, through the theft of surplus labour from an already besieged labour force is occurring right when the government is using the economic downturn to justify the shedding of thousands of unionised jobs and to cut key public services, including education and health. But all of this is not enough for Bush's captains of capital, who having exploited the U.S. working class and plundered the nation's natural resources are now out to increase their fabulous riches and profits through a resurgence of imperialist war.

Of course, the Byzantine world of the U.S. labour movement does boost some prominent

dissenting voices and a growing number of local unions and wider union organisations have adopted anti-war resolutions such as the one by the Washington State Labour Convention in August 2002 (Socialist Future Review, 2002). But even a cursory check reveals that, whilst plenty of discontent exists at the base of American society, the U.S. labour movement has not delivered on any of its vague promises, acting only to bargain over the price of labour power. Moreover, aside from its support for Bush's war plans, the pro-capitalist AFL-CIO continues to be an instrument of U.S. foreign policy, with its government subsidised international programs sabotaging left-wing unions and politics overseas (Shorrock, 2003). Take for example, the AFL-CIO's financial support for the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers (CTV), which is allied with Venezuela's business elite against the leftist government of Hugo Chavez. Such deplorable actions speak louder than words and reflect the labour aristocracy's standpoint of social-chauvinism, demonstrating that it still has absolutely no appreciation for socialist internationalism. Unwittingly or not, this thwarting of expectations (after the euphoria surrounding Sweeney's election in 1995) has led to widespread demoralisation and defeatism, threatening to doom workers to the status of road kill under the wheels of an irresistible historical juggernaut of imperialist war and privatisation.

No, people are not dancing in the streets, nor sitting on the stoops of their crumbling tenement houses toasting the Bush administration, they are fighting for their lives, not just in places like Afghanistan and Iraq but also right here in the bloated white belly of the imperialist beast. Given the blatant contempt of the U.S. ruling class and our so-called political representatives toward the working class, workers must get over the illusion that bourgeois democracy, U.S.-style, represents the best of all possible worlds a time in which there exists no alternative to capitalism and focus on the consequences of minority rule and imperialist war. Even though the state has assumed a more violent and oppressive character, the situation is not bleak or without opportunities. For example, mass

participation in the anti-war movement is just one indication of the latent but explosive potential to create broad opposition to imperialism in the United States. Movements like this provide a glimpse of how a mass uprising of people might be developed to weaken U.S. imperialism and to get rid of production for profit along with its attendant antagonisms including patriarchy, national oppression (e.g., Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American, Hawaiian and other oppressed and indigenous peoples) and white supremacy.

Yet, in the U.S., many middle class whites and ordinary working class people in the anti-war movement duped by their own apparatus became captives of the social chauvinists. As a result, support amongst whites 'withered away' shortly after the bombing campaign in Iraq began in earnest. Against this trend, support for the war remains dramatically lower amongst black Americans who instinctively realise through their own unique experience and history that the government's actions are not altruistic (The Gallop Organization, 2003). Drawing upon the long history of their disenfranchisement, including the mistreatment of black veterans after previous wars, the black community in the U.S. has played a critical role in previous anti-war movements, such as the stance taken by Martin Luther King Jr. against the Vietnam War (The Associated Press, 2003). The lesson is clear, if the U.S. anti-war movement is to grow any larger to curb future wars in Iran, Syria, Korea or Venezuela, it must confront its real tasks of defeating national chauvinism, racism and attacks on the Third World. The only historic force that can put a stop to capitalism, which has entered a dark and escalating period of imperialist (not just U.S.) war, is the international working class. As Lenin (1915) concluded in *Socialism and War*, the only way we are ever going to win 'lasting peace' or the right to a decent education or job is through the linking of all our struggles against the vicious ruling class and the belligerent heads of government (e.g., Bush, Blair and Howard) that represent them.

While the U.S. citizenry entertains itself with the recent sex scandal involving basketball

superstar, Kobe Bryant, and anticipates the possibility of the film superstar, Arnold 'The Terminator' Schwarzenegger, capturing the governorship of California, the U.S. military continues its assault on the non-white world, as the shimmering ghosts from the colonial subjugation of India by the British and of Africa by the French and Portuguese, waft over history's blood red horizon. Borrowing the ideology from Hollywood's dream machine, the U.S. media cranks into action, as images of the blonde Jessica Lynch are paraded throughout newspapers nationwide. Of course, unbeknownst to most U.S. citizens is that accompanying this glorification of the conquering white hero is a media blackout on important details about the Iraqi resistance that could embarrass and be detrimental to the Bush regime. When such information does appear, resistance to the illegal occupiers is dismissed as involving only political waifs who have washed up from the sewers of the former Ba'ath Party. Recently, Iraq's U.S. civilian administrator, L. Paul Bremer III, described those responsible for recent attacks on U.S. forces as "bitter-enders" – leftovers from the former regime. At the same time, President Bush is now calling for military assistance from the very international community he disparaged immediately before the invasion. In the ongoing dehumanisation and murder of the non-white other, there are echoes of Vietnam, and the slaughter of 2 million Vietnamese as a result of the wanton aggression of the most powerful racist superpower in human history. Of course, if the deepest memories of subjugated US history were to break through the crusted blood of its structural unconscious, citizens of the world's most heralded democracy would have to face the genocidal slaughter of its indigenous peoples, and the unbearable carnage of the "middle passage" that brought Africans in chains to work and die in the plantations of the Southern U.S. states.

With all the focus of attention on the swift victory of 'coalition' forces against Iraq, it is worth remembering that the infrastructure of Iraq had been shattered for over a decade as a result of US sanctions. In the words of Kewli, Nzito (2003),

the real destruction that requires this "reconstruction" was wreaked for over a decade by US sanctions, killing 50,000 children annually, according to UN estimates. To this genocide, which prompted the resignation of three UN arms inspectors, Madeline Albright, Secretary of State under Bill Clinton responded: "It will all have been worth it." Meanwhile, Iraq's vast and immensely rich historical heritage – one that belongs to *all* of humanity – was left to the whims of looters. This is a case of crude oil taking precedence over human heritage. Where else would these priceless artifacts be found except in the homes of some rich Westerners, making their pile from other people's history?

We in the United States, in the belly of the Beast, have found ourselves, once again, in the giddy thrall of empire. The ruling class, an overwhelmingly white comprador elite, thrills at the prospect of an empire unchained. The hawks in the White House have intensified their efforts to make this happen (the stage was set for this, of course, by previous administrations). The empire shows little sign of weakening. Capital's vice-grip only grows stronger. The ruling elite continues to announce to the public that they have a responsibility as the world's only superpower to bring to Iraq democracy and free-market capitalism (which have been symmetricised to mean the same thing). That supposedly creates the acceptable equation: Illegal Occupiers = Liberators. But in reality it is the same deadly encounter between the coloniser and colonised bleached of its real function within a dominant hierarchy. As Nzito (2003) writes:

This instinctive contempt for alien cultures typifies the encounter between colonizer and the colonized. A renowned British historian, Trevor Roper once said that Africa is a dark continent and darkness is not a subject of history, implying that no meaningful history can be attributed to the dark races. And if any magnificence should be encountered in

their history, it should be sought in the libraries of the West, where its experts stand ready to explain the native to himself. Colonialism in essence then equates with the robbery from the colonized of the sense of the collective self. So this invasion of Iraq then adds up to more than addiction to oil: it is utter disdain for the alienated Other and their perceived outlandish histories and cultures. Consequently, any claims to the love of liberty as the declared motive for the invasion of Iraq must be strictly taken for what they represent – for your info and entertainment only, a bit like your daily horoscope.

For us, it is not enough to see the invasion of Iraq as an example of Western racism. Clearly, it is this, but it is much more. Contemporary variants of multiculturalism in the West—even the most progressive used in colleges of education—tend to view the history of ethnic antagonism (domestically and internationally) from the perspective of ‘race’ in which race is identified with characteristics of phenotype and skin colour, cultural traditions, belief systems, and social practices. We argue, instead, that the starting point for understanding ruling class wars – wars against the working class as well as wars against foreign countries – should be situated within a critique of racism, with racism being understood, first and foremost, as *racialised class relations*. We reject the popular intersectionality argument put forward by many post-structuralist and post-modernist theorists that stipulates race, class, gender and sexual orientation should all receive equal attention in understanding the social order and the institutions and ideologies that constitute it (see Darder and Torres, in press). By maintaining that various oppressions such as racism, sexism, and class exploitation are to be engaged with equal weight in the course of ascribing pluralised sensibilities to any liberatory political project reduces capitalist exploitation and relations of capitalist production to one set of relations among others which systematically denies the totality of capitalism that is constitutive of the

process of racialised class relations (Darder and Torres, in press; Scatamburlo-D’Annibale and McLaren, 2003). This is not to argue that the pernicious ideology of racism is not integral to the process of empire via capitalist accumulation. Nor is it to privilege an analysis of class exploitation over an analysis of racism, but, as Darder and Torres argue, it is an attempt to prevent the antiseptic separation of politics and economics as distinct spheres of power or ensembles of social relations. Rather than focus on race, or raced identity (i.e., shared phenotypical traits or cultural attributes), we make the case for concentrating upon the ideology of racism and racialised class relations within a larger materialist understanding of the world, thereby bringing the analysis of political economy to the centre of the debate (see Darder and Torres, in press). Separation of the economic and the political within current contributions of multiculturalism premised on identity politics has had the effect of replacing an historical materialist class analysis with a cultural analysis of class (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale and McLaren, 2003). As a result, many critical race theorists as well as post-Marxists writing in the realm of cultural studies have stripped the idea of class of precisely that element which, for Marx, made it radical—namely its status as a universal form of exploitation whose abolition required (and was also central to) the abolition of all manifestations of oppression.

Unlike contemporary narratives which tend to focus on one or another form of oppression, the irrefragable power of historical materialism resides in its ability to reveal how forms of oppression based on categories of difference do not possess relative autonomy from class relations but rather constitute the ways in which oppression is lived/experienced within a class-based system and how all forms of social oppression function within an overarching capitalist system. We believe that an understanding of the ‘Big Lie’ that is presently devouring America needs to be understood within the context of the imperialising of capital, and the racialisation of imperialism.

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E. P. THOMPSON: HISTORY AND COMMITMENT

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Each new generation of radical activists is faced with the task of ascending from theory to practice. The ideas of socialism are easy, how do we make them relevant? We can only ever trace this process, through its impact on the lives of individuals. We all know how historians are supposed to live: with winter in our heart, leather patches on the sleeve, spectacles on our nose. We should avoid all controversy, or if we must succumb to it, make our complaints known only in an academic milieu. We should seek full-time employment for a university, write for a peer audience of fellow academics, and in due course be promoted to a condition of managerial oblivion.

The British radical historian E. P. Thompson defied that path exuberantly. At the start of his career, he rejected the comfort of a university career for the much harder task of adult education, teaching workers. Later in life, when his international reputation was made, Thompson turned his back on history itself, to build the peace movement. As he told one friend in 1981, 'I have been so fully preoccupied with matters which concern me as a citizen - the settled direction towards a terminal collision in Europe that I have had to set aside for a time my work as a historian. I have been forced to take leave of libraries and to spend my time in public meetings and turn my pen to pamphlets and public correspondence.'¹ In 1986, Thompson confessed to a public meeting, 'I don't even have a valid ticket to the British Library or the Public Record Office'.² There was always a movement that came first.

Yet there were also moments when the experiences gained by a life on the left reinforced

¹ E. P. Thompson, *Beyond the Frontier: The Politics of a Failed Mission, Bulgaria 1944* (London: Merlin Press, 1997), p. 7.

² E. P. Thompson, *Persons and Polemics: Historical Essays* (London: Merlin, 1994), p. 360.

the quality of his research. One example of a book informed by the movement is Thompson's best-known study, *The Making of the English Working-Class*. It was based on documents gathered by activists met through his teaching. Edward Thompson himself dubbed *The Making* his 'West Riding' book, to remember the activists whose documents and memories had so shaped the book.³ The search for an overarching moral code informs not just his peace writing but also Thompson's book *Whigs and Hunters* which supports the rule of law as a universal good, something to be defended in all periods including our own.⁴

The interaction between the insights that we might expect to find in an 'activist' and in a 'historian' is most clear in Thompson's book of polemics, 'Outside the Whale', 'The Peculiarities of the English', 'The Poverty of Theory'. In these essays, Thompson used the traditions of his generation - the familiarity of war, the memory of the Communist Party (CP) at its height, the founding of the New Left and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament - as a common fund of experience from which to criticise a series of false arguments on the left, all of which tended to assimilate the story of people's lives to a dull, prior model. The alternative, Thompson labelled 'socialist humanism'. This was both a programme for Communist reform, and at one and the same time, an intervention within Marxism, an argument for a different form of socialist literature, a history closer to the fund of people's real experience.

³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 edn). T. Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies: Cultural Politics, Adult Education and the English Question* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997), p. 150.

⁴ E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), pp. 258-69.

What were the sources of Thompson's activism? Edward Palmer Thompson was born in 1924. His father Edward John Thompson had been an educational missionary in India, and later became known as a champion of Indian independence, and a friend of such men as Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru.⁵ Edward Thompson joined the British army and served in the war at Cassino. Having undergone military service, Thompson returned to Cambridge where he became active in the Communist Party. Reflecting later on his motives for joining the CP, Thompson described the sense he felt of joining an 'international fraternity' of resistance.⁶ At Cambridge, he met his first wife Dorothy, another left-wing historian.

The decisive moment in the evolution of E. P. Thompson's ideas was the Second World War. In later life, he returned to this period, 'I recall a resolute and ingenious civilian army, increasingly hostile to the conventional military virtues, which became ... an anti-fascist and consciously anti-imperialist army. Its members voted Labour back in 1945: knowing why, as did the civilians back home ... Our expectations may have been shallow, but this was because we were overly utopian and ill prepared for the betrayals at our backs.'⁷ Shallow, utopian, ill-prepared - the metaphors all imply error - and yet something better, behind and explaining the fault, a sort of deliberate innocence, the open eyes of a child, the only perspective from which a non-cynical society could be built. One part of Thompson's distinctive socialism was the idea, then, that the people of the wartime alliance constituted *the generation* against which any later politics should be judged. Another characteristic theme was the defence of imprecision and of moralism. It was better to be 'shallow', but to mean well, than to have possess the lifeless consistency of a commissar.

⁵ E. P. Thompson, *Alien Homage* (Delhi: Oxford University press, 1993).

⁶ E. P. Thompson, *Beyond the Frontier: The Politics of a Failed Mission, Bulgaria 1944* (London: Merlin Press, 1997), p. 57.

⁷ E. P. Thompson, 'The secret state within the state', *New Statesman*, 10 November 1978.

In 1948, Thompson left London for a post at the extra-mural department in Leeds. For some years, he taught English Literature to groups of workers. He served on the Yorkshire Committee of the British Communist Party, and played a leading role in the local peace movement. E. P. Thompson's first full-length book was a biography of William Morris, the craftsman and early British Marxist.⁸ Edward Thompson was interested in Morris both as a poet and also as a political organiser. These were important themes of Thompson's own life as well.

Edward Thompson left the Communist Party in 1956, alongside a generation of disaffected socialists. His main argument with the party concerned the positions it had previously taken, of unqualified support for the Soviet Union. But when the crimes of Stalin had been revealed, and when the USSR had sent tanks against the workers in Hungary, this entire lines came in for widespread criticism. Thousands quit the party. Thompson criticised his former comrades from the perspective of socialist humanism, which he defined as 'the voice of a Communist opposition, of a total critique of Stalinist practice and theory'.⁹ Such humanism, he argued, was the true expression of the best aspects of the workers' movement. In that sense, it meant loyalty to a particular generation of people, and their insights. 'For the veteran leader of the Derbyshire miners, Bert Wynn, solidarity with our critique meant (as for many others) severing connections within his own heart; for the full-time organiser of the Leeds Communist Party, Jim Roche, formulating the positions of socialist humanism meant getting out his tools and returning to the cutter's bench.'¹⁰

E. P. Thompson thought - like any good historian - in terms of traditions. There was the tradition of the 1939-1945 war, lit up by the example of his brother Frank who died fighting alongside Bulgarian partisans in the depths of the

⁸ E. P. Thompson, *William Morris* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1955).

⁹ E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and other Essays* (London: Merlin, 1987), p. 324.

¹⁰ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 325.

conflict. There was the tradition of his fellow radicals who left the Communist Party in 1956. There was the English legacy of dissent, which he invoked frequently in debate. 'Talk of free will and determinism, and I think first of Milton. Talk of man's inhumanity, I think of Swift. Talk of morality and revolution, and my mind is off with Wordsworth's 'Solitary'. Talk of the problems of self-activity and creative labour in a socialist society, and I am in an instant back with William Morris.'¹¹

There were times when Edward Thompson's championing of radical English pioneers seemed almost to focus on their English character, rather than their radicalism as such. Much of this 'patriotism' was invoked ironically. At other times, Thompson defended himself against the charge of chauvinism by reminding his readers that England had only been part of a common European ferment of ideas. There are hints of a petty nationalism which arise momentarily, but never last, because they were incompatible with the whole drift of Thompson's political activity, his support for Indian socialists and his visits to the subcontinent, his work for nuclear disarmament, which could be achieved only across Europe as a whole.

In the period after 1956, Thompson defended his generation in the *New Reasoner* magazine, 'I began to reason in my thirty-third year', Thompson wrote, 'and despite my best efforts, I have never been able to shake the habit off.'¹² Critics to the left saw his departure from the Communist Party as an act of treachery. Critics to the right asked why they New Left still kept any loyalty to Marxist commitment? Thompson's 1960 essay, 'Outside the Whale' used the morass of contemporary British poetry as a negative guide against which to set a moral critique of Stalinism.¹³

While acknowledging the insights that Thompson gained by means of his distinctive philosophy, including his absolute commitment to the cause of the East European dissidents, the historian of the New Left Michael Kenny has taken our author to task for 'romanticism'. The theory remained underdeveloped, he suggests, and resolutely negative. Clear as it was in critique of Stalinism, it offered no positive conception of the rules by which people would live.¹⁴ The same critique was made even during the 1950s and in the pages of the *New Reasoner*. Alasdair MacIntyre complained that ethical commands were often so timeless as to exist beyond reproach, or so contingent as to provide poor guidance to those who used them. Humanism could not be detached from 'the history of the class struggle'.¹⁵

E. P. Thompson's political activity continued - like his humanism - long beyond the moment of crisis in 1956. Twelve years later, Thompson worked with Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall on what became the *May Day Manifesto*, a socialist challenge to the rightward drift of Labour politics under Harold Wilson. Later, in the 1980s, he was a full-time activist in European Nuclear Disarmament. Thompson warned against the danger of 'exterminism', the natural right-wing way of thinking about the world, which would sacrifice whole peoples for the sake of victory in the Cold War. Martin Shaw terms him a 'nuclear pacifist' - meaning that while Thompson supported the right of small nations to defence themselves against the might of armed superpowers, he was working seriously for a world without war.¹⁶

Thompson's most important historical work was *The Making of the English Working-Class*. An account of the workers' movement in the decades

¹¹ Cited in S. Ashman, 'The Communist Party Historians' Group', in J. Rees (ed), *Essays on Historical Materialism* (London: Bookmarks, 1998), pp. 145-60, here p. 157.

¹² S. Woodhams, *History in the Making: Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson and Radical Intellectuals 1936-1956* (London: Merlin, 2001), p. 127.

¹³ 'Outside the Whale', in Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, pp. 1-34.

¹⁴ M. Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp. 69-83.

¹⁵ A. MacIntyre, 'Notes from the Moral Wilderness', first published in *The New Reasoner* 7 and 8 (1958-9), and reprinted in K. Knight (ed.), *The MacIntyre Reader* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp. 31-49.

¹⁶ M. Shaw, 'From Total War to Democratic Peace: Exterminism and Historical Pacifism', H. J. Kaye and K. McClelland (eds), *E. P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (Temple, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 233-52, 249.

between the French revolution and Chartism, *The Making* addressed a key moment in the transformation to capitalism. In Karl Marx's original scheme of development, this period was just as important as the 1640s. Although by 1780, a capitalist class was already clearly in the ascendant, it was still a mercantile class. It could generate profits from trade, but not yet in production. Only industry could secure the indefinite creation of profit in this way. Thus for Marx, industrial capitalism was a higher form of capitalism, perhaps the highest form of all. Edward Thompson examined the impact of the Industrial Revolution through the experiences of artisans, weavers and others dispossessed by the change from an agricultural to an urban society.

The Making of the English Working Class begins properly with the launching of the London Corresponding Society in March 1792. The society was shaped by the experience of the French revolution, and began to outgrow the limits of the milieu in which it began. Thompson's account continued through a discussion of the ideas of Tom Paine, and their influence on working-class circles. Hundreds of thousands of people absorbed his argument that the people needed neither an aristocracy nor a king. The second part of Thompson's book was largely devoted to the social and economic processes of class formation. Moving away from London, the focus of his book turned towards the textile workers of the West Riding, their conditions and their complaints. Drawing on diverse sources, including parish registers and medical records, Thompson showed that the factory system was based on organised cruelty. Thompson's third section addressed workers ideas. He explored distinct groups of people, including the Irish in Britain, working women, Luddites and machine-breakers. By the late 1830s, the working class had indeed been made, its traditions of class separatism and class loyalty were long-established. It was in the workers' political movements that the existence of a definite class could best be seen.

The most famous passages in *The Making* are found in its 'Preface'. Here Thompson defended

his project of opening up plebeian lives to a historical gaze. The ignorance of other writers should be not seen as history's final verdict: 'I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" handloom weaver, the "utopian" artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been dying. Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.'¹⁷ The key idea in the book was 'experience'. All the people who have lived have deserved equally to be remembered.

There is an important tradition of criticism that has been fired back against this book. By making such an open-ended defence of class, it is suggested that E. P. Thompson opened up the gates to more subjective readings. Our historian was even guilty, at times, of encouraging this reading. E. P. Thompson explained his argument to an Indian audience, in December 1976, "'Without production, no history" as R. S. Sharma has properly insisted, But we must also say, "Without culture, no production".'¹⁸ The journalist Sam Ashman suggests that Thompson's cultural definition of class contributed to the subsequent rise of postmodernism.¹⁹ Another Marxist critic, the philosopher Alex Callinicos, has taken up the argument, 'the trouble with experience is that it is, by definition, subjective. To describe how someone experienced an event is to describe that event from that person's point of view. In principle,

¹⁷ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 13.

¹⁸ E. P. Thompson, 'Folklore, Anthropology and Social History' in *Indian Historical Review* 3/2 (1978), reprinted as E. P. Thompson, *Folklore, Anthropology and Social History* (Brighton: Studies in Labour History, 1979), p. 20.

¹⁹ Ashman, 'The Communist Party Historians' Group', pp. 145-60.

therefore everyone's experience is as valid as anyone else's.²⁰

We cannot resolve the argument here, except by pointing out that Thompson was a lifelong critic of such traditions as structuralism and post-structuralism, on which post-modernism later drew. Meanwhile, Thompson's critics are themselves guilty of under-emphasising the radicalism of his work. The idea of experience is inherently democratic. It points towards an exuberant conception of history, quite different from the usual litany of glorious (but tragic) defeats that many socialists are encouraged to learn. There are many parts of the world, meanwhile, where new historians are still needed to rescue the voices of the poor and the oppressed, to write without closing our ears to all the human stories that there have been.

Thompson's academic career is well known. What historians always run the risk of forgetting is really his life as a committed activist in the movement. Having turned away from the Communist Party, Thompson attempted to construct an alternative socialist history, which combined the best insights of Marxism with an interest in morality and human agency. History-writing and political activism succeeded one another in an arbitrary sequence decided not by any prior order, but by the requirements of life itself. At the end of the 1970s, Thompson saw a need for peace campaigners to challenge the threat of nuclear Armageddon. 'For the next decade', as the historian Bill Schwarz records, 'Thompson effectively dropped his historical researches to become, again, an activist in the peace movement.'²¹

According to Kate Soper, this was the most productive period of all. 'At any moment he might be found exhorting the masses in Trafalgar Square to "feel their strength" or manning the bookstall at the European Nuclear Disarmament bazaar; playing percussion in a fund-raising concert or haggling at the Czech embassy over the suppression of the Jazz

Group; dialoguing with Charta 77 or marching at the head of an anti-NATO rally in Madrid; exposing the grotesqueries of the SDI programme or railing against the skulduggery of the Soviet Peace Committee.'²²

This period of activism ended prematurely, with Thompson's death in 1993. Ten years after his death, Thompson deserves to be remembered both for the quality of his writing but above all for the character of his life. Here was a man who wrote clearly, who aimed his books at an audience of politicised workers, who never compromised with capitalism nor with the comforts of the academy.

²⁰ A. Callinicos, 'Marxism and the crisis in social history', in Rees, *Essays*, pp. 25-40, 37.

²¹ B. Schwarz, 'History on the Move', *Radical History Review* 57 (1993), pp. 202-20.

²² K. Soper, 'Edward Palmer Thompson', *Radical Philosophy*, spring 1994.