

# THE POLITICAL LEGACY OF THE MANIFESTO

Colin Leys and Leo Panitch

## I

We are living in interesting times. The tide of reaction is still flowing, but with diminishing confidence and force, while the counter-flow of progressive feeling and ideas gathers strength but has yet to find effective political expression. As the contradictions of unbridled neoliberalism become increasingly plain, fewer and fewer people any longer mistake its real character. 'Stubborn historical facts' are breaking through the illusions fostered by neoliberal rhetoric – and equally through the pseudo-left illusions of 'new times', 'radicalism of the centre' and all similar dreams of a capitalist world miraculously freed from alienation, immiseration and crises.'

At the peripheries of the global economy – in most of Africa, in Central America, in South Asia – historical facts have never permitted most people the **luxury** of such illusions, even if the elites of these countries embrace and foster them. Such recent experiences as the misery and barbarisms provoked by 'structural adjustment' in dozens of countries in Africa, or the rape of the public sector in Mexico, have done nothing to make neoliberalism **more** beguiling to ordinary people anywhere in the former Third World. Where the propagandists of the 'Washington consensus' did achieve some ideological sway over working people was above all in the 'North'. But there too, after nearly two decades of capitalist restoration, painful reality increasingly prevails over corporate newspeak.

Some 40,000 multinational corporations – fifty of them now receiving more revenue than two-thirds of the world's states – frenetically merge, restructure, 're-engineer', 're-configure' and relocate themselves, in an almost parodic speed-up and trans-nationalisation of **Marx's** famous Manifesto script. 'Whole populations' – from the

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women workers in the free trade zones of southern China and northern Mexico to the huge new immigrant workforces of Western Europe and North America – are now 'conjured out of the ground' (in **Marx's** unforgettable phrase) in less than a generation; while others – like older manual workers, and the growing reserve army of young people – are as rapidly conjured back into it **again**.<sup>2</sup> Ruthless downward pressure on real incomes, enforced by the restoration of large-scale permanent unemployment (thirty-four million people – plus their families – in the OECD countries alone) **through** corporate 'downsizing', spectacular failures (Pan Am, British Leyland, Barings, Yamaichi) and the re-casualisation of work – all of these give new meaning to the Manifesto's portrait of how 'growing competition', 'commercial crises' and the 'unceasing improvement of machinery' make people's livelihoods 'more and more precarious'. Nor is it any longer 'loosely connected **provinces**' that are **being** 'lumped together' by the bourgeoisie, with 'one national class-interest, one frontier and one customs-tariff'; what the capitalist classes now seek is nothing less than the abolition of all frontiers and all tariffs, and a Multilateral Agreement on Investment, a universal treaty giving investors legally – and if necessary, no doubt militarily – enforceable rights, that would tie states even more securely to capital's global class-interest.

All this is becoming clear. Journalists can no longer speak, as they did in the 1980s, of 'the business community', as if it were some benign college whose interests were more or less identical to those of the nation as a whole; **simply** to stay credible they must now talk about 'the corporate **agenda**' and the threat that capitalism (no longer a taboo word) poses to the environment, and about the problems of poverty and homelessness it is creating, the erosion of social security and the negative impact on standards of health and education.'

As Boris Kagarlitsky has recently remarked: 'Reaction is a natural historical phenomenon, but it becomes exhausted just as revolutions do. When this exhaustion sets in, a new phase of revolution can **begin**.'<sup>4</sup> We are still far from witnessing the exhaustion of the neoliberal reaction, or restoration, although the symptoms of its fatigue are accumulating (**including** the inability of parties too ostentatiously identified with it to continue to win **elections**).<sup>5</sup> But as is also normal with all reactions, this one too is already overreaching itself, partly because, as Kagarlitsky has also noted, the post-war settlement in the West was underpinned **by** fear of the Communist threat and the lifting of this threat removed a significant constraint on capital's political ambitions.

Since the collapse of the post-war settlement in the 1970s capitalists had wanted to 'lower expectations', and a clear reaction in the West began to emerge, led by Thatcher and Reagan, aimed at breaking the power of organized labour, expanding the scope for capital accumulation through privatisation, and replacing collective welfare by entrepreneurship and individualism as the legitimating values of liberal democracy. With the collapse of Communism, however, the project could be pursued even more ruthlessly. Unemployment could be raised to mass levels, public services and welfare programmes could be cut more and more drastically, and inequality restored to **nineteenth-century** levels, without any anxiety about the need to maintain social cohesion in face of the red menace, or to prove to workers in the West that they were as secure as their Soviet bloc counterparts, as well as better **paid**.<sup>4</sup>

So the social contradictions of capitalist competition returned in force. Even with over 20 million unemployed in Europe, among those still in full-time jobs the weekly hours worked rose, and so did chronic sickness, and so did crime, and the numbers of people in jail.' The great economic 'success' story of the **mid-1990s**, the United States, with an official unemployment rate of only 5% compared to over 11% in the European Union, rests on an unprecedented reduction in American workers' real incomes over the past quarter century. Even during the economic 'recovery' of recent years 'the proportion of people losing jobs is . . . at an all-time high. Between 1992 and 1995, 15 percent of people holding jobs for more than one year lost those jobs; their new jobs, if they found one, paid 14 percent less on average.'

All this could happen without capital any longer **feeling** even a lingering vestige of concern about the threat of communism. But it could not continue without even the western working class eventually starting to ask themselves again for whose benefit all these sacrifices were being made, and when they would end. By the mid-1990s strikes in France, the USA and Canada once more occupied the front pages alongside reports of strikes in South Korea and 'IMF riots' throughout much of the former Third World from Zimbabwe to Mexico. There was also a sharp rise in class awareness. As even the Economist noted, 'Many commentators think that class is dying, but ordinary people are not convinced. In fact class antagonisms may even be worsening – the proportion of voters believing there is a "class struggle" in Britain rose from around 60% in the early 1960s to 81% in the **mid-1990s**, according to Gallup . . .'<sup>5</sup> And in the United States, a *New York Times*

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poll in 1996 found that 55% of Americans now defined themselves as working class while only 36% defined themselves as middle class, a major reversal of the traditional American pattern; and no less than 60% of those who had experienced a layoff in their family thought that 'the government should step in to do something' and attributed 'a lot of the blame for the loss of jobs on the economic system in this country'.<sup>10</sup>

### II

To see the outlines of a new period of class struggle taking shape, however, is not the same thing as seeing clearly how to engage in it; and it remains true that the left has been severely disempowered and disorganized by the scope and ruthlessness of the capitalist restoration and the effects of global **deregulation**. The independent left, the militant activists in both the trade unions and the new social movements who have withstood the pressures to capitulate to market hegemony, are a potentially far more significant force than the right likes to pretend. But there is nonetheless an acute sense, within this left, of a political *absence*: the lack of a capacity to go beyond 'networking', beyond pluralism (hard-won and rightly cherished as that is), to find new ways to give coherence and strategic direction to collective efforts to mobilise and make effective the developing reaction *against* the market, *against* capital.

It is this widespread sense of a political absence that makes the political legacy of the Manifesto especially relevant today. As Rob Beamish shows in his essay in this volume, the Manifesto, while drafted by Marx, was 'the product of an extended and intense but open debate among committed communist-internationalists' who were trying to fashion political organizations through which the collective efforts of the working classes to understand and confront the major problems of their time could cohere and have greater effect. The eventual result was the mass working-class parties of the late nineteenth century; and so much did these become part of the political landscape that it is easy to **forget** that such autonomous political organizations of the subordinate classes were an entirely new historical phenomenon, and that it took the better part of a half-century, after the defeats of 1848, to make them a reality. By the time of the Manifesto's centenary in 1948, Social Democratic and Communist parties were among the leading forces on the world's political stage. Nevertheless, it was because these parties no longer embodied the

radical legacy of the Manifesto that so many of the '1968 generation', only two decades later, not only rejected these particular parties, but eventually came to doubt the appropriateness of the 'party' as a political form.

Yet most people who are active in political and social struggles today feel the need for something that will perform some essential tasks that used to be performed by parties. This confirms Cynthia Cockburn's premonition in the 1970s that, for all the exciting and energetic pluralism of the new community movements, there was something lacking; that their struggles, if conceived apart from 'an arena of conflict between the dominant and exploited class', would be in danger of failing to cohere despite their proximity to each other

**within the working class and its near neighbours. . . . They shake out as tenants, ratepayers, teenage youth, house owners, swimming enthusiasts and squatters. All are asked to compete and defend their special interests, while the class with real power remains untouched. . . .**<sup>11</sup>

The necessity of going 'beyond the fragments', while not replicating the defects of the old parties or their sectarian offshoots, was already being argued brilliantly by Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright by the end of the 1970s;<sup>12</sup> but the 'articulation' actually achieved between social movements and progressive trade unions – in forms that range from the Rainbow Coalition in the USA and the Action Canada Network in Canada to the Anti-GATT/WTO Movement in India and the Opposition to the Devastation Caused by the World Bank/IMF in Sri Lanka – have consisted mainly of 'popular front'- style strategic networking between the top leaderships of the various organizations. What has always been missing – and this is now strongly felt by many social movement leaders themselves – is something that would be more than the sum of the parts, something which the Social Democratic and Communist parties did partly provide in their heyday.

This is, at one level, simply a matter of offering electoral alternatives. The century-long frustration that American **political** activists have experienced through **being** unable to translate political agitation and mobilization into **meaningful** electoral choices is now increasingly felt elsewhere; the accommodation of **the** old Communist and Social Democratic parties in Europe to the neo-liberal agenda – epitomised now by 'New' Labour in Britain – is giving activists there a taste of what the absence of a mass **working** class party in the USA has meant throughout this century (and which the American left is now trying again to **rectify** with the New Party and Labour Party initiatives)."

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But it is much more than a matter of what to do on election day. It is about all the things Marx had in mind when he wrote that the 'immediate aim' of all proletarian parties was the 'formation of the proletariat into a class'. These included providing activists with a strategic, ideological and educational vehicle; a political home which is open to individuals to enter (rather than restricted, as today's social movement networking often is, to representatives of groups); a political community which explicitly seeks to transcend particularistic identities while supporting and building on the struggles they generate; and through all of these things, serving as the incubator of a new social force, providing a structure but also an agency which expresses the pre-existing range of identities while also expanding them – 'helping to organize what it claims to represent', as Margaret Keck aptly put it in relation to the Workers' Party of Brazil –<sup>14</sup> and which in doing so achieves the capacity to 'make history'. This, at any rate, is what Marx meant by 'revolutionising praxis', by 'the alteration of men on a mass scale' – and what a party today must be able to do.

The 'formation of the proletariat into a class' is, moreover, not something that once attempted and even partially accomplished, is then finished; the working class, once 'made', is not 'fixed and frozen', as imagined by traditionalists who cling to every cultural as well as socio-economic encrustation – nor by (post?) modernizers who abandon the working class as hopelessly outdated and unchangeable, and go in search of more fashionable agencies. New parties have already arisen and more will arise, profoundly conscious of how much they need to be different from the old Social Democratic and Communist parties if they are to form today's proletariat into a new class, a class once again capable of making history. But 'making history' in what sense? A discriminating view of the Manifesto and its legacy is needed in this respect.

### III

We need to ask, first of all, what was the nature of the revolutionary message of the Manifesto, as opposed to the way it has been understood, especially by its critics. It was **certainly** above **all** a revolutionary document, and it has always been taken as calling for a political revolution as a prelude to a social and economic one; the October revolution has been seen as a response to its call, and Stalinism as a logical consequence. But it is worth reminding ourselves that this is not

The revolution Marx called for (and thought inevitable) was a revolution in social relations. As Bernard Moss points out elsewhere in this volume, Marx, like all his contemporaries, had the example of the French Revolution sixty years earlier very much in mind, and thought a new political revolution – 'the forcible overthrow of existing conditions' – would be necessary in order to achieve the social revolution in most countries, given the predictable resistance that would be offered by the bourgeoisie and its allies to any **fundamental** change in relations of production. Only in 1872 – twenty-four years after writing the Manifesto – did he cautiously allow that in countries with long traditions of democracy (like the USA, Britain, and perhaps the Netherlands) the workers might 'attain their goal by **peaceful means**'.<sup>15</sup> In later writings Marx was also apt to put more stress on the possibility of revolution spreading to the capitalist heartlands from the system's unstable 'extremities'; and, as Shanin and others have pointed out, since he was always impatient for action, he backed the revolutionary wing of the Russian populists against their proto-Menshevik opponents, even though this was not fully consistent with his analysis in the main body of his work, whether the *Manifesto* of 1848, or the *Grundrisse* written in the late 1850s, or *Capital* completed in the mid-1860s. What this did show, however, was that he did not believe that all peoples were fated to tread an identical path to **socialism**.<sup>16</sup>

Revolutions in the 'periphery' would, evidently, also be more or less violent. Marx's attitude to this was **practical**. The right of revolution – 'the only **really** historical right', as Engels put it just before his death in 1895, 'the only right on which all modern states rest' – was a democratic right, the right of the majority to make their own history; it would be exercised peaceably if possible, forcibly if **not**.<sup>17</sup> Marx's profoundest political commitment was to this democratic right, as his subsequent idealisation of the Paris Commune of 1870 as exemplifying an unprecedentedly radical kind of democracy also makes clear; it was from the opponents of socialism that he anticipated violence, and not without cause.

Having said this, it remains true that there was also an unresolved tension in Marx's attitude, reflected in the concept of 'proletarian dictatorship'. On the one hand it meant, **för** him, 'democracy carried to its **fullest**' (with the Commune as its example), in the sense of the majority class becoming the ruling class for the first time in history; on the other hand, it meant a period of centralised and repressive rule entailing strict measures to defeat the old ruling classes and prevent counter-revolution. The risk that coercion might become institution-

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**alized** and overwhelm the democratic dimension of the revolution, Marx spent little time thinking about. Yet this was to become a tragically familiar pattern in the twentieth century. As Isaac Deutscher, reflecting on the October Revolution, put it:

Every revolutionary party at first imagines that its task is simple: it has to suppress a 'handful' of tyrants or exploiters. It is true that usually the tyrants and exploiters form an insignificant minority. But the old ruling class has not lived in isolation **from** the rest of society. In the course of its long domination it has surrounded itself by a **network** of institutions embracing groups and individuals in many classes; and it has brought to life many attachments and loyalties which even a revolution does not destroy altogether. . . . The revolution therefore treats its enemy's immediate neighbour as its enemy. When it hits this secondary enemy, the latter's neighbour, too, is aroused and drawn into the struggle. The process goes on like a chain reaction until the party of the revolution arouses against itself and suppresses **all** the parties which until recently crowded the political **scene**.<sup>18</sup>

Evidently, the subsequent history of the twentieth century has produced no easy answers to this conundrum. But it is no answer at all to take the obduracy of capitalists and their allies as a sufficient reason for the majority to abandon their only 'really historical right'.

Even in the conditions of a capitalist democracy the question of how the state's capacity for repression can be overcome by a mobilised majority bent on exercising its historical right, remains as difficult to answer today as it was a hundred years ago when Engels, just before he died, grappled with it in the text already **quoted**. Anticipating Gramsci, **Engels argued** that in Europe the insurrectionary strategies of 1848 had become obsolete by the 19th century's end. The conditions of struggle had essentially changed, he noted, partly due to technical reasons: the modern city with its broad boulevards, the modern army with its firepower. But more **fundamentally**, the conditions of struggle had changed because the conditions of hegemony had changed. 'Even in the classic time of street fighting . . . the barricade produced more of a moral than a material effect. It was a means for **shaking** the steadfastness of the military.' By 1849, however, when the bourgeoisie had everywhere 'thrown in its lot with the governments . . . the spell of the barricade was broken; the soldiers no longer saw behind it 'the people' but rebels, agitators, plunderers, levellers, the scum of society. . . .'<sup>19</sup> Now, almost **fifty** years later, **Engels** was convinced that 'an insurrection with which all sections of the people sympathize will hardly recur; in the class struggle all the middle strata will probably never group themselves round the proletariat so exclusively that in comparison the party of reaction gathered round the bourgeoisie will

well-nigh disappear.' But he did believe that the growth of the mass working class party in Germany by **1895** was such that, operating legally, it had a chance of winning over the middle strata; and, in any case, 'to shoot a party which numbers millions out of existence is too much even for all the magazine rifles of Europe and America.'

**The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what it is they are going for, body and soul. The history of the last 50 years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long persistent work is required. . . .**<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately **Engels** immediately went on to treat electoral successes as evidence of this mass mobilisation, as if the entry of Social Democrats into national governments, or even the election of municipal councillors, meant that the masses were really 'in it.'" A century of experience of the 'parliamentary road to socialism' has taught us better.

A further problem with the Manifesto's legacy is that it says very little about politics after the revolution, and this is also true of **Marx's** later writings. His attitude was summed up in the position he ascribed to the working class Communards who, he said, had 'no ready-made utopias', but knew **they** must pass 'through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and **men**.'<sup>22</sup> In this he was surely right. But his resistance to blueprints kept Marx from addressing the question of what kind of institutional structures socialist democracy would require, and left him open to the charge, advanced by a long line of critics from Bakunin onwards, that simply to declare 'when class distinctions have disappeared' political conflict would disappear too ('the public power will lose its political character', as the Manifesto puts it) was a perfect rationalisation for the permanent dictatorship of an elite ruling in the name of the workers.

This criticism plainly fails to appreciate the whole thrust of **Marx's** approach; but it is true that for Marx simply to imagine a harmonious collaboration among all 'the **associated-producers**' was indeed to beg **fundamental** questions about the kind of democratic politics that would be possible and necessary in a world from which the private ownership of the means of production would have been abolished, but in which manifold other differences among people would remain. And it is also true that Marx seriously overestimated, in the Manifesto and

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later, the extent to which the class structure would be simplified, the 'middle classes' squeezed out and marginalised and the **global working** class itself homogenized. Things were not going to be simplified in the way he imagined.

But we have to keep a sense of historical proportion. The complex problems that were faced by the new mass working-class parties – including major divisions of interest within the working classes themselves, the rise of the professional middle class, and much else – could hardly be worked through in advance by Marx. In tackling these problems, however, the mass parties – the Communist and Social Democratic parties which have really influenced the history of this century – failed to sustain Marx and Engels' distinctive political practice: the combination of social-scientific analysis, based on their materialist interpretation of history, with engaged political writing and speaking – pamphlets, lectures, articles, addresses, reports, letters – in which they tried to make current history intelligible to activists in such a way that they themselves could draw from the experience of their struggles the lessons they contained, and be better able to try to 'make their own history'. Instead, Social Democrats and Communists increasingly resorted to treating **Marx's** ideas as a text, a **body** of findings, either to be followed as dogma (subject to constant quasi-theological reinterpretation) in the case of the Communists, or to be rejected (after repeated revisions) in the case of the Social Democrats. And this was even more true of the numerous small revolutionary groups whose political impact has been marginal (even if their role in developing remarkable activists and intellectuals should not be underestimated).

It was to avoid this that both Marx and **Engels** often declared their opposition to all attempts to elevate their ideas into a 'system', and insisted that their conception of history was 'above all a **guide** to study' and that 'all history must be studied afresh'; but very few people in either the Communist or the Social Democratic parties have done this in the way Marx and **Engels** did it themselves. As vehicles for socialism, however, these parties have in any case run their course; the true political legacy of the Manifesto – to develop a politics concerned above all with ensuring that the masses really are 'in it' – remains to be taken up again by others.

## IV

To say this is to go against the current of much so-called left thought and practice over the past two decades. **After** what can now be seen as

a very brief spell of attempting to renew Marxism in the wake of 1968 we have gone **through** a period since the early 1980s when not only was the idea that 'Marxism is over' quite widespread among people who still defined themselves as being on the **left**,<sup>42</sup> but the very idea of socialism as a systemic alternative to capitalism was dubbed an 'anachronistic **irrelevance**'.<sup>43</sup> The resulting vacuum has been filled by social democratic 'modernisers' whose egalitarian commitments are even weaker than those of post-war social democracy in the West.

It is of the utmost importance to assess the reasons for this, as three major recent historical surveys of the century have **sought** to do. Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes* portrays the trajectory of socialism in this century as largely determined by the necessary forced march to industrialization in that part of the underdeveloped world where Communist revolutions occurred. **Capitalism's** powerful tendencies to globalization eroded the determination and capacity of the authoritarian elites in control of those systems to avoid integration into the capitalist order; while the same forces of globalisation also undermined the policies as well as the party and trade union organizations through which Social Democracy in the West had presided over the 'golden age' of the mixed economy in the post-war era. Hobsbawm cannot see any alternative to the path followed either by the Communist or Social Democratic parties. The tragedy of the October revolution was that it could only produce a ruthless, brutal command socialism. The tragedy of Social Democracy was that the Keynesian welfare state could not withstand the corrosive forces of capitalist globalisation.

For all its brilliance, Hobsbawm's argument is also remarkably contradictory. He insists that the failure of Soviet socialism does not reflect on the possibilities of other kinds of socialism; yet he also contends 'that it may well be that the debate which confronted capitalism and socialism as mutually exclusive and polar opposites will be seen by future **generations** as a relic of the twentieth-century Cold Wars of Religion.' In so far as this is the case, one might expect him not only to proclaim the virtues of the Social Democratic project, but also to provide some grounds for its revival. But far from doing this, he declares he has no solutions to offer, no way out of the process of the erosion of the nation state and democratic politics by capitalist **globalisation**, no way of halting the process whereby 'human collective institutions had lost control over the collective consequences of human **action**.'<sup>44</sup>

It is noteworthy that the actual policies and programmes of the parties and labour movements of the left figure hardly at all in

Hobsbawm's text. The rise and fall of the golden age seem determined almost entirely by the dynamics and cycles of capital accumulation. This gap has been filled, however, by the publication of Donald Sassoon's *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, a work of almost 1,000 pages, warmly praised by Hobsbawm, which focusses on the Western European Left in the second half of the century. Sassoon writes very much from the perspective of the accommodation to capitalist globalisation represented by the Blairite 'modernisers' in Britain, the 'renavadores' in Spain, the 'riformisti' in Italy, the 'nouveaux realistes' in Belgium. He sees them as building on and completing the revisionist tradition, from Eduard Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism* at the end of the last century to Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* and the Bad Godesburg programme of the German SPD at the mid-point of the present one. Summarizing his views in the *Guardian*, Sassoon writes that the abandonment of the old class politics and public ownership goals by today's modernisers finally delivers

**socialists of a utopian albatross. Capitalism is not a particular transitory historical phase in historical development but a mode of production. The task of socialists lies in devising a political framework which enables the advancement of certain values, such as justice and equality, while ensuring that the regulatory system does not seriously impair the viability of capitalism.<sup>26</sup>**

Sassoon is right to connect Blair to Bernstein, but there was nevertheless something very different about the old revisionists. They thought that capitalism was tending towards state collectivism and managerialism, and that this undermined the anarchic and inegalitarian tendencies of capitalist markets and confirmed and reinforced the reformist strategies of Social Democracy. But in recent decades capitalism has moved in the opposite direction to the one they expected and predicted. It is the arguments of the Marxist critics of revisionism, from Rosa Luxemburg to the founders of the Socialist Register, who insisted that capitalism would eventually revert to a competitive and inegalitarian market logic, that are being confirmed today. All that is left linking today's modernizers with their revisionist predecessors is their accommodation to the dynamics of capitalism. Whereas Bernstein and Crosland had believed that this accommodation could yield a more planned and egalitarian social order, today's modernizers know (and they mince no words in saying so) that this means accommodating to an ever more competitive and market-driven one.

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In light of the modernizers claim to be free of all old illusions, it is worth recalling that much social democratic opinion in the 1950s was inspired by the same idea – the idea that it had become irrelevant to pose alternatives in terms of 'socialism versus capitalism'. The difference lay in the optimistic register in which the theme of reconciliation between capitalist markets and socialist values was expressed then. Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*, first published in 1956, famously encapsulated the thinking of a whole generation of social democratic leaders and intellectuals in western capitalist countries. It opened with the argument that the post-war 'transformation of capitalism' had, once and for all, proved the Marxist analysis of capitalism wrong. According to Crosland the post-war world had witnessed three 'fundamental changes in the social framework' which no Act of Parliament could undo: (1) in the political sphere, a 'peaceful revolution' had transformed the state, so that 'the capitalist class has lost [its] commanding position' vis a vis governments; (2) in social relations and social attitudes there had been a 'decisive shift' of class power towards the **working** class at the expense of business; and (3) in the economy, there was a fundamental **change** in the nature of the business class whereby 'the economic power of the capital market and the finance houses, and hence capitalist financial control over industry (in the strict sense of the word) are . . . much weaker. This change alone makes it rather absurd to speak now of a capitalist ruling class.'<sup>77</sup>

In making this case, Crosland refused to adopt what he called 'the current fashion' of sneering at Marx. Marx, in his view, was 'a towering giant among socialist thinkers' whose work made the classical economists 'look flat, pedestrian and circumscribed by comparison . . . only moral dwarfs, or people devoid of imagination, sneer at men like that.' That said, he was convinced that **Marx's** writings had 'little or nothing to offer the contemporary socialist' because they related to 'conditions that had long since passed.' Yet it is obvious today that what Crosland took as fundamental conditions were in fact temporary – conditions that have long since disappeared. In almost every respect, the **analysis** of the Manifesto is today more relevant and less anachronistic than Crosland's text, written over a century later.

Yet despite the passing of the **conditions** on which Crosland built his case, today's modernizers are not only apt to sneer at Marx, but to denigrate anyone with the temerity to suggest the need for an anti-capitalist strategy. The vacuum that 'modernisation' as a political project represents was revealed by Sassoon amidst a detailed discussion of the French Socialist Party's retreat in the 1980s:

To give up the ambition of abolishing capitalism... is not much of a strategy. Modernization as a slogan sounds appealing, but it has done so for over a hundred years. No party of the Left in post-war Europe (and hardly any party of the Right) has ever been against modernization. One suspects the watchword, devoid as it is of any practical content, is used purely symbolically: to be for modernization means to be for progress without abolishing **capitalism**.<sup>28</sup>

Yet this is precisely where Sassoon ends up. Like the modernizers, Sassoon directs his strongest criticisms at those who do not appear to be sufficiently 'aware' of the limits **global** markets impose on an anti-capitalist strategy. To be sure, he does not want to join in 'the supine endorsement of the neo-liberal glorification of the market' and he approvingly quotes Keynes as saying that 'capitalism is a beast to be tamed', but he offers no means of doing this, merely endorsing the modernisers strategies.

In sharp contrast, Gabriel Kolko's no less remarkable *Century of War* stresses the mistaken **choices** Communist and Social Democratic parties made, rather than treating their choices as inevitable, as **Hobsbawm** and Sassoon tend to do. Kolko attributes the mistakes to weaknesses of analysis as well as of organization and leadership:

Their consistent failure to redeem and significantly (as well as permanently) transform societies when in a position to do so is testimony to their analytic inadequacies and the grave, persistent weaknesses of their leadership and organizations. It is this reality that has marginalized both social democracy and communism in innumerable nations since 1914, providing respites through the century to capitalist classes and their allies that otherwise would never have **survived** socialist regimes that implemented even a small fraction of the reforms outlined in their **program**.<sup>29</sup>

While this may bend the stick too far the other way, it is, indeed, only by coming to terms with these mistakes of analysis and strategy that we can **begin** to delineate an alternative to global capitalism. Social Democrats, no less than Communists, need to face up to their failed analyses and strategies and models, to come to terms with the fact that they were wrong in following Crosland in identifying the 'golden age of capitalism' with 'the future of socialism'.

But the fact that Crosland was so obviously wrong does not make Marx right. To be sure, one increasingly finds today alert columnists once more affirming that Marx was right about the nature of capitalism, and the sneering dismissals of Marxist analysis that became so common in the 1980s are less often heard in the media **now**.<sup>30</sup> This kind of superficial 'rediscovery' of Marx must not divert us, however,

from addressing the real conundrums of socialism in this century; and we must also guard against any tendency to revert to that idiom of the revolutionary left in which fundamental questions were systematically evaded, on the assumption that if the Manifesto, or **Marx's** other writings, **didn't** pose these questions, let alone solve them, they could be disregarded. Drawing on the legacy of the Manifesto today means treating it not as a sacred text, but first and foremost as an inspiration to construct a political agenda for our own time.

## V

An agenda: hardly the term that comes most readily to mind to describe the Manifesto, certainly not its brilliant Part I, written in the style of an epic prose poem on the rise and impending fall of the capitalist world. Yet this was exactly the point: 'more or less history has got to be related in it', as **Engels** prosaically noted (perhaps not yet aware of the **full** extent of his friend's literary powers), shortly before Marx was to begin **writing**.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the most fundamental political legacy of the Manifesto is that any serious agenda must first include a materialist analysis of contemporary history.

What this means for us now is, first of all, coming to a clear understanding of the twentieth century's passages **through** uneven development to 'globalization'. The Manifesto foreshadowed, with an accuracy that still astonishes, the 'universal inter-dependence of nations' which it has been the business of our century to realize:

**All old-established industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed . . . dislodged by new industries . . . whose products are consumed . . . in every quarter of the globe. . . . The bourgeoisie . . . compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production . . . to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst. . . .**

What Marx could not specify, of course, was the precise pattern this complex and violent process would actually take in this century, now blocked, now rushing headlong, **through** world wars, television, electronic **banking** and the hamburger.

It has also taken a lot longer than he seems to have imagined; with world population increasing more than fivefold since **Marx's** time, it was only in the decades following the first centenary of the Manifesto (when world population had already reached 2.5 billion) that a majority of the world's people ceased to be peasants and whole populations around the globe were transformed into an urban (semi-) **prole-**

tarial.<sup>21</sup> This goes far towards explaining the spatial pattern of reform and revolution in the twentieth century. In Arrighi's insightful formulation, the 'social power' which labour enjoys because it is indispensable to capitalist production was concentrated in the West and made reformism rewarding, while the immiseration which made for revolution (especially in the former Russian and Chinese empires) was concentrated at the 'periphery'.<sup>22</sup>

This was partly a question of imperialism, as Engels, Lenin and many later theorists argued; cheap food and raw materials and other forms of surplus transfer from the periphery contributed significantly to the living standards of western workers, and imperialist ideology and racism reinforced bourgeois hegemony. Other factors were also involved, however. Down to the 1960s it remained possible for the organised western working class to make major gains through wage bargaining with employers who had limited opportunities to relocate, and to extract reforms from the governments of industrialised economies. It was not till after 1945 that the transnational corporation, developed in the inter-war years, became generalised, and not until the 1980s that, with the aid of computerisation, the TNC's realized their full potential for world-wide control of production and finance. Social changes at the periphery created more and more centres with the requisite externalities for advanced production (security, transport, communications, an elite of high-tech workers and a supply of disciplined semi-skilled wage-labour); changes in the labour process reduced dependence on established labour forces, while a decline in the material element in manufactured goods and falling transport costs increasingly eroded older forms of 'natural protection'; the end of the formal empires in the 1960s, followed by the end of the Soviet system, opened up the whole planet to capitalist penetration. The result of all these changes was that the extraction and realization of *relative* surplus value finally became possible for capital on a global scale – if not exactly everywhere at least somewhere in many parts of every continent and subcontinent – in a way that earlier forms of imperialism had not established.

The longer-run political implications of this, however, are very hard to read. What are the implications, for instance, of the fact that nearly *one billion* people around the world, according to the ILO, were unemployed or underemployed in 1996?<sup>23</sup> Or of the fact that Chinese government reports are now projecting *hundreds of millions* of 'surplus' workers in rural areas by the year 2000?<sup>24</sup> Or of the fact that East Asia, the region of the world that has been the preeminent magnet for the

West's surplus capital, is now plunged in crisis?<sup>36</sup> Or of the fact that whereas the IMF credit the British Government needed to prevent an economic collapse in 1976 was \$4 billion (at the time the largest ever requested), the sum needed to do the same job for Mexico in 1994 was \$48 billion, while for South Korea in 1997 even \$60 billion was not enough. 'Experts' cannot predict when or where the next financial crisis will strike, or the next 'natural' disaster. When we contemplate all this we need to remember that it does not represent the planned outcome of a 'corporate agenda': there is a political project for capital, and it does involve driving down living standards in what used to be called the 'Second' and 'Third' worlds as well as the 'First'. But in the North as well as the South, capital is, as always, driven as much as it is driving. It is being driven by the unrelenting competition between capitals in each sector as well as by the global financial markets which not only impel capital to downsize, merge, reconfigure, restructure and relocate, but also furnish the means of doing so: the increasingly dramatic and unpredictable results are anything but planned.

It was not only social democrats like Crosland who could not have been more wrong on the decline of the financial element in the capitalist class, but also all those, including Galbraith, who thought they saw a new technocratic industrial elite coming to manage the economies of the world. Instead, the Manifesto's image of the capitalist as 'the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells' captures all too well the concerns increasingly expressed by significant elements of the international establishment – from advocates of the Tobin tax to George Soros – that some means must be found of regulating the chaos of contemporary capitalism. This is why the first item on the left's agenda today has to be that of relating every national experience to the widest possible analysis of the accelerating and increasingly uncontrolled contradictions of the global accumulation process. What certainly will become clear, from such analyses, is that through the processes of globalisation, the 'social power' of western labour has declined and impoverishment – or the threat of it – has returned. The 'Chinese walls' that are now being 'battered down' by cheap goods are no longer only the pre-capitalist social structures at the periphery, but also those protecting high wages and welfare-state benefits of all workers – including those in the West – with no more than average global skills.<sup>37</sup> The world taken as a whole has indeed now begun to resemble the pattern Marx's logic led him to foresee, and the conditions that used to sustain western workers' reformism are being undermined.

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What might replace that reformism is very hard even to imagine. Throughout the post-war era everyone assumed that a return to mass unemployment would lead to a loss of legitimacy for capitalism; even the western bourgeoisie delayed turning to unemployment as a means of stemming inflation and driving down the price of labour and, even when it did, it watched with apprehension to see how high unemployment had to go before the back of wage militancy was broken. But the legitimacy of capitalism was not brought into question. Many workers saw that they were dependent on 'the goose that laid the golden egg'<sup>38</sup> and accepted the case the goose's owners made for making it well again. They were unfortunately encouraged in this by 'post-Fordist' intellectuals who saw in 'flexible specialization' the path to a new regime of accumulation. Most leaders and activists were less prepared to accept the capitalists' arguments and insisted on the continued viability of the old Keynesian and corporatist arrangements; in effect, they struggled to defend the old managed capitalism. This should not have been surprising: workers have often confronted new insecurities by appealing to idealised memories of earlier times, recalling 'the shadowy image of a benevolent corporate state';<sup>39</sup> and in this they too were encouraged by some social democratic intellectuals who fostered the illusion that stability could be had by clinging to (or imitating) Swedish or German or Austrian corporatism.

After two decades, however, we are in a new conjuncture. Neither the dream of a 'post-Fordist' future nor that of a safe return to the neo-corporatist past is any longer tenable; it becomes more and more obvious that there will be no magic moment when 'prosperity' is restored, unaccompanied by constant demands for still further rounds of sacrifice. Yet at the same time struggles to bring back the Keynesian welfare state have less and less meaning for young people who never knew it, or even for their parents who have ceased to believe in it. It inevitably took some time for the dynamics of neo-liberalism to become familiar and to be seen as normal phenomena of capitalism in the era of globalisation, but it has happened. On the other hand, to understand neo-liberalism objectively does not necessarily induce fatalism. On the contrary, a good many workers, as we have seen, are recognising that they are willy-nilly trapped in a class struggle and are once again blaming the economic system for their situation.

That said, what is still absent is any concrete notion of an alternative system. People in the former Communist countries are learning first-hand that capitalist streets are not necessarily paved with gold;<sup>40</sup> but they, like many workers in the old Third World, have no other model

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of well-being than that of the western consumer portrayed by the media. Yet there can still be no other way forward for working people anywhere than once more building movements oriented to ending the rule of private property – beginning with imposing effective controls on capital mobility through cooperation between national governments with a **popular** mandate to do so, and democratizing control over the major means of production, distribution, communication and exchange.

And here the historic failure of Bolshevism weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. The Russian and Chinese revolutions and their aftermaths dominated our century; their brute achievements in face of the bitterest odds, the courage and intelligence they mobilised and consumed, the hopes **they** raised and ultimately disappointed, the immense human costs – the memory of all this is now an extra barrier that the anti-capitalist **struggle** has to overcome. Giving our goals their proper name – full democracy – will not prevent them being called communist. But the effect of that association will not forever be negative if we can figure out how to make our commitment to democracy genuine and our **goals** for it viable.

### VI

'To win the battle of democracy': this is what the Manifesto saw as 'the first step in the revolution', the primary condition for establishing 'the political supremacy' of the working class.

In the established liberal democracies opinion polls show that representative party politics have never been more despised, and the connection between genuine democracy and an equitable distribution of social and economic power is becoming clear in a way not seen, perhaps, since the struggles for franchise extension in the last century. This is hardly surprising. Not only have national governments transferred power to determine their citizens' economic fates to 'market forces', but as extreme inequality has been restored and welfare-state protections have been stripped away, they have also done their best to close down avenues for popular forces to oppose the process, let alone reverse it. Presidential decrees of dubious constitutionality override parliamentary majorities; legislation curtailing democratic rights is pushed through, contrary to pre-election promises; the powers of local government are usurped; the powers of the police are extended, the powers of juries curtailed; and political parties – including now, the Labour, Socialist, Social Democratic and Democratic Left parties – are

themselves 'modernised' – i.e. power is taken away from their mass membership and given to small groups of professional politicians ('people who make a business of politics') and their market-survey, media-oriented advisers.<sup>41</sup>

Disillusion has also rapidly overtaken the much-touted globalisation of 'liberal democracy', the so-called 'third wave' democratisation announced by Huntington and other apologists for neoliberalism. As often as not it has turned out to mean 'no more than a military despotism and a police state, bureaucratically carpentered, embellished with parliamentary forms' (as Marx said of 1875 Germany).<sup>42</sup> And in any case international agencies are ready to intervene to ensure that elections do not get in the way of the interests of global capital: within a few short weeks in November-December 1997 the IMF extracted public undertakings from all the leading candidates in the South Korean Presidential elections before the poll that they would abide by the liberalising conditions of an IMF loan – without which an economic disaster was categorically promised.<sup>43</sup> Perry Anderson's comment is, if anything, an understatement: 'Democracy is indeed now more widespread than ever. But it is also thinner – as if the more universally available it becomes, the less active meaning it retains.'<sup>44</sup>

A further dimension of the emasculation of democracy everywhere is the importance of the mass media. Here the legacy of the Manifesto is not of much help. Marx recognised that 'the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.'<sup>45</sup> But he also thought a revolutionary class could create its own means of mental production; and while for a time they did so with their publishing houses and newspapers, he did not foresee the way mass-circulation newspapers would become essentially vehicles for selling advertisements, and would in this way eventually bankrupt progressive newspapers that could not raise equivalent advertising revenue.<sup>46</sup> Nor could he foresee how this would be repeated on an even more spectacular scale with radio and television after other means of communication – and especially the public meeting, which was still the key popular medium of communication in Marx's time – had become so much less effective.

The fact is that in most countries of the world the main 'conversation of society' now takes place through a medium – television – from which issues of public concern are increasingly displaced in favour of entertainment and sport, and from which, when public

affairs are discussed, **left** perspectives are often deliberately **excluded**.<sup>47</sup> This change – whereby not only has public conversation been commodified, but a medium has been developed that effectively gives a monopoly of public conversation to capital – has to be one of the most politically critical developments of the last century; yet the left has still **fully** to register its immense **significance**, and develop a commensurate response. Solutions exist: broad public access to mainstream media is not the stuff of fantasy but a democratic necessity, for which institutional models already exist in various countries in Europe, in **particular**.<sup>48</sup> It is high time to make it a non-negotiable element in a mass campaign for the restoration of democratic rights.

But this is only a beginning. Contrary to the interested arguments of the 'professional representative' class (as Raymond Williams aptly called it), periodic elections – absolutely **fundamental** as they are – are anything but the only practicable democratic institution that a complex modern society requires. There is an rich **legacy** of **genuinely** democratic theory – and of practical experience, from the Paris Commune **through** Italian Council Communism to the 'social movement' organisations and experiments (east and west, south and north) of our own times – that has still to be assimilated. The range of possibilities is vast, including various kinds of monitoring, reporting and accountability without which elections alone are ineffective as a means of controlling power; deliberative democratic procedures (as in 'citizens' juries') that pre-empt the distortion of democratic debate by adversarial rhetoric; various forms of democratic management (representative supervisory and executive boards, collective managements, job rotation, selection by lot); segmented, coalitional forms of **organisation**; 'socialised' information systems and institutions of the kind proposed by Diane **Elson**; the list could be extended almost **indefinitely**.<sup>49</sup>

The **left** must make itself the legitimate champion of this legacy by embodying it in its own practice, and driving its significance home to the widest possible **public**. We need to expose at the same time the way so much local grass roots popular activity is coming to be structured and appropriated by today's modernizing elites (including the World Bank working **through** NGOs). The capitalist class will undoubtedly not relinquish the power they have recently re-established behind their pseudo-democratic facade without a bitter fight; but the first necessity is still to articulate a convincing, practicable and consistent conception of genuine democracy to set against it. If the point of drawing on the legacy of the Manifesto is indeed 'to exaggerate the given task in the

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imagination, rather than to flee from solving it in reality, to recover the spirit of revolution, rather than to set its ghost walking *again*,<sup>50</sup> then bringing to life these visions of radical popular democracy must also be at the very top of our agenda.

The Social Democratic parties – not to mention the Bolsheviks – failed to do this precisely because the political forms they created, or adapted to, sapped the 'spirit of revolution'. It was because **Marx** was so sensitive to the danger of bureaucracy sapping the spirit of revolution that he made so much of what the Paris Commune suggested about workers discovering new radical democratic means of avoiding this. Yet the notorious 'statism' of socialism in this century was also perhaps inscribed, it must be said, in the Manifesto's own conception of what the proletariat would need to do, at least in the short run, when it achieved power, above all in the stress it placed on the *centralisation* of control over credit, communications and production in the hands of the state – not only to divest the bourgeoisie of its power, but also in order 'to increase the total of *productive* forces as rapidly as possible.'

What inspired so many Social Democrats and Communists in the twentieth century was precisely this idea that planning would be more efficient than markets. When, however, neither the Communists nor the Social Democrats found that planning production enabled them to displace capitalism ('bury' it, as **Khrushchev** said), they came to terms with it: the Communists through '*peaceful* co-existence', the Social Democrats through the Keynesian welfare state. The radical democratic vision was sacrificed; and this eventually paved the way for the neo-liberal reaction. It was the neo-liberals, in successfully deploying the rhetoric of revolution to promote market freedom as the 'common sense' of the era, who showed that capital, even at the end of the twentieth century, still retained the spirit of bourgeois revolution and the capacity make the world in its *image*.<sup>51</sup> But **capital's** idea of freedom brought to the fore once more the contradiction which had first surfaced during the French Revolution, between private capital and political *equality*.<sup>52</sup> It is this, together with the destructive social effect of global free markets – epitomized in Mrs. Thatcher's notorious statement 'that there is no such thing as society' – that makes the **Manifesto's** charge that the bourgeoisie is no **longer** 'fit to rule' seem so very contemporary: 'society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.'

Is it too much to hope that the left can learn valuable lessons from neo-liberalism's sweeping victories over both neo-corporatist and

**central-** command forms of planning? In his Preface to the 1888 English edition of the Manifesto **Engels** wrote: 'The very events and vicissitudes of the struggle against capital, the defeats even more than the victories, could not help bringing home to men's minds the insufficiency of their favourite nostrums, and preparing the way for a more complete insight into the true conditions of working-class **emancipation**.'<sup>53</sup> The **original** new **left's** critique of both Bolshevism and Social Democracy pointed in the right direction – that is, towards democracy over planning, and towards social revolution rather than co-existence. But the failure of the new left either to transform the existing Social Democratic and Communist parties or to found viable new ones led a strong current of left-wing opinion to give up on both socialism and the working class, in favour of a more **diffuse**, 'decentred' conception of 'radical democracy'. This stance swept under the carpet the irreconcilability of democracy with private property that the French Revolution had itself so clearly brought to light – and this was something that could hardly be **ignored** in the era of **globalization** and neoliberalism. The 'free development of each' can only be 'the condition for the free development of all' in so far as private property is abolished.

This, in other words, must come clearly back onto the agenda. Once again, as in the Manifesto, it must be made clear that this does not mean personal possessions, that socialism 'deprives no [one] of the power to appropriate the product of society; all that it does is to deprive [anyone] of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation.' And to this end we too need to put forward practical policies, as the Manifesto did with its ten-point programme, that can begin to make 'inroads on the rights of property', the kinds of 'measures. . . which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the social **order**.'<sup>54</sup>

It is sobering to note how far the measures they put forward are still relevant today. John **Bellamy** Foster, in his important essay in this volume on the Manifesto and the environment, makes this point regarding the passages that have to do with land policy, especially the one which calls for 'the improvemenr'of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.' Equally relevant is the Manifesto's proposal for 'a heavy progressive or graduated income tax', given the massive redistribution of income and wealth from the poor to the rich over the past twenty years. And the unprecedented power which capital mobility now places in the hands of the bourgeoisie, not to mention

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the financial instability that accompanies it, makes the Manifesto's call for credit control no less relevant, and moreover prefigures the proposals for capital controls that are now **being** put forward even on the liberal and social democratic left, not just by Marxist political economists writing in the Socialist *Register*.<sup>55</sup> Contemporary proposals for the radical redistribution of working time and life-long education, such as those advanced by Greg Albo in last year's Socialist *Register*,<sup>56</sup> are also **prefigured** in the Manifesto's calls for the 'equal liability of all to labour' and 'combination of education with industrial production'. The legacy of the Manifesto is very much present, in other words, in the most sophisticated socialist economic proposals being advanced today, such as Albo's ten-point programme for achieving 'egalitarian, ecologically-sustainable reproduction' through measures directed at 'expanding the scale of democracy while reducing the scale of production'.<sup>57</sup>

The struggle to implement these measures must be both national and global; and this too is very much part of the Manifesto's legacy. While it called on the workers of the world to unite, it also argued that 'the proletariat of each country must . . . first of all settle things with its own bourgeoisie' – because to accomplish anything, the workers 'must *first* acquire political supremacy', which meant winning power in the nation-state. But then as now, too, 'united action, of the leading . . . countries at least, is one of the *first* conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat'.<sup>58</sup> It is inconceivable, for example, that effective capital controls can be put in place without such cooperation; yet this implies a wave of national struggles that will commit the leading states to them.

This multiple set of conditions explains the superabundance of '*firsts*' in the Manifesto. Yet all these first steps and conditions are themselves conditional on yet another, even more primary: the 'formation of the proletariat into a class.' The various other kinds of socialist so mordantly criticised in Part III of the Manifesto had one common fault in Marx's eyes: that of seeing socialism in terms of the introduction of measures 'for the benefit of the working class' by people 'outside the working-class movement . . . looking rather to the 'educated' classes for **support**'.<sup>59</sup> The **priority** Marx attached to the 'formation of the proletariat into a class' needs to be understood in terms of his commitment to the self-emancipation of the workers. But this did not mean **merely** the formation of unions and parties that would express the particular interests of workers. 'The basic thought running **through** the Manifesto', as Engels later put it, was that the

class oppression and conflict that has marred all previous human history could only be ended once humanity reached 'a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time for ever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class **struggles**.'<sup>60</sup>

The working classes' lack of credibility as general emancipators in our time not only explains why the feminist and ecology movements, engaged in struggles crucial to human emancipation, have often defined themselves in opposition to the **working** class; it also explains why, for the first time in a century, and despite the rise of the new social movements, we lack a sense that there is an alternative to capitalism. The separation of the social movements from working class politics, unfortunate but understandable, tragically became crystallized into dogma by a generation of intellectuals. As Edward Thompson noted in the *Socialist Register* as early as 1973: 'There were real reasons for this [dismissal of the **working** class as an agent of **general** emancipation] but the writing off did damage to intellectual growth itself' He went on to say, in his famous 'Open Letter To Leszek Kolakowski':

You appear to share this instant dismissal, writing: . . . 'Let us imagine what the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would mean if the (real, not imaginary) working class took over exclusive political power now in the US.' The absurdity of the question appears (in your view) to provide its own answer. But I doubt whether you have given to the question a moment of serious historical imagination: you have simply assumed a white working class, socialized by capitalist institutions as it is now, mystified by the mass media as it is now, structured into competitive organizations as it is now, without self-activity or its own forms of political expression: **i.e.** a working class with **all** the attributes of subjection within capitalist **structures** which one then 'imagines' to achieve power without changing either those structures or **itself**: which is, I fear, a typical example of the fixity of concept which characterizes much capitalist **ideology**.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, the question of how the alteration of people 'on a mass scale' can come about is a huge one, to which there is no ready-made answer. But, to repeat, classes are never frozen and fixed, they are constantly changing; and there is good reason to look **forward** to – and to work for – developments **through which** working classes will increasingly acquire a broad emancipatory outlook, a 'spirit of revolution' expressive of the full range of identities they comprise. Their potential power can in any case now **only** be fully realized if, far from trying to ignore or efface these differences, working class organisations express and gain strength from the plurality of identities that make up the

proletariat. The recomposition of the proletariat that has been going on in recent decades 'before our eyes' (to employ, in a particularly relevant context, another of **Marx's** favourite terms)<sup>62</sup> needs to be soberly examined from this perspective, as the essays in this volume by David Harvey, Sam **Gindin**, Sheila Cohen and Kim Moody seek to do. What is certainly clear is how little help the parties that once based themselves on the working classes have been in this respect. Nothing speaks more clearly than this to the need for new ones.

For the moment we might seek inspiration from the remarkable communist-internationalists of the 1830s and '40s who were then trying to fashion appropriate organizations through which working people could develop themselves. After the leaders of **League of the Just** were expelled from France in 1839 they made their way to London, where Schapper, Bauer and Moll founded the German Workers' Educational Society. We could do worse today than emulate their efforts, as advertised on one of the Society's posters:

The main principle of the Society is that men can only come to liberty and self-consciousness by cultivating their **intellectual** faculties. Consequently, all the **evening** meetings are devoted to instruction. One evening English is taught, on another, geography, on a third history, on the fourth, drawing and physics, on a fifth, singing, on a sixth, dancing and on the seventh communist **politics**.<sup>63</sup>

## NOTES

We are grateful to Greg Albo, Fred Bienefeld, Martin Eve, Sam **Gindin**, Margie **Mendell**, Ellen Wood and Alan Zuege for their comments and criticisms on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. 'Ultimately, when stubborn historical facts had dispersed all intoxicating effects of self-deception, this form of Socialism ['Petty-Bourgeois Socialism'] ended in a miserable fit of the blues' (Karl Marx *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings Volume I*, D. Fernbach (ed.), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974, p. 90. On 'new times' see Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds.), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, London, Lawrence and **Wishart** and *Marxism Today*, 1989, a collection of articles published by *Marxism Today* in the late 1980s. The book ended by suggesting that Gorbachev's perestroika was an inspiring example of the politics needed for 'new times', and *Marxism Today* closed soon after Gorbachev's fall. On 'radicalism of the centre' as articulated by the Blair leadership of the Labour Party see Leo **Panitch** and Colin **Ley**s, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour*, London, Verso, 1997, chapter 11.
2. On these 'new populations' at the end of the twentieth century, see Nigel Harris, *The New Untouchables: Immigration and the New World Worker*, London,

Penguin, 1996.

A 'teach-in' in Toronto on 'challenging corporate rule', sponsored by the Council of Canadians in November, 1997 drew over 1,500 people. One press report headed its account 'Not Scared of the C-Word', *The Varsity*, 11 November, 1997,

4. Boris Kagarlitsky, 'The Unfinished Revolution', *Green-Left Weekly*, Sydney, Australia, 5 November, 1997.
  5. The most dramatic examples are the 'melt-down' of Canada's Progressive Conservatives, who went from being the governing party to holding only two seats in the Federal Parliament in the election of 1993, and the British Conservatives, who after 18 years in office pursuing neoliberal policies were reduced to less than a quarter of the parliamentary seats (and none at all in Scotland or Wales) in the election of 1997. Even without such dramatic collapses, it was noteworthy that by 1997 social democratic parties were in office in 12 of the 15 states of the EU.
  6. Giovanni Arrighi, 'Workers of the World at Century's End', *Review XIX/3*, Summer 1996, pp. 339-40.
  7. The UK, which had the **longest** working hours in the EU, **also** had the fastest rising index of inequality (second only to New Zealand within the OECD), while the numbers of people unable to work due to chronic illness rose steadily from about 600,000 in 1979 to nearly 1.8 million in 1997 (equal to the total of those officially unemployed). Britain was also second to the OECD in the proportion of the population in jail, while in the USA, which ranked first, the probability in 1997 of any adult being jailed at some time in his or her lifetime was 5.1 per cent (9 per cent for all men, and 28 per cent for all black men). *Business Week* August 11, 1997.
- Alexander Cockburn, 'The Witch Hunt and the Crash', *The Nation*, November 17, 1997. 'Between 1992 and 1995, 15 percent of people holding jobs for more than one year lost those jobs; their new jobs, if they found one, paid 14 percent less on average. The rate of job loss in the nineties 'boom' is higher than in the recession years of the early eighties or of 1990-91.' Cockburn adds that 'about one-third of the U.S. labor force makes \$15,000 or less'. This reflects the fact that, as Kim Moody reports: 'The 80% of the total workforce in the US that hold working-class jobs saw their real average weekly earnings slip by 18% from 1973 through 1995. Real hourly earnings in that period fell by 12%, indicating that the growth of part-time work had reduced the average weekly income of US workers by another 6 percentage points.' Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World*, London, Verso, 1997, p. 188.
9. 'Fighting the class war', *The Economist*, 27 September, 1997.
  10. 'The Downsizing of America', *The New York Times*, 5 March, 1996.
  11. Cynthia Cockburn, *The Local State*, London, Pluto, 1977, p. 118.
  12. Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments*, London, Merlin Press, 1979.
  13. Writing in the **mid-1980s**, when he was a **close** adviser to Jesse Jackson, Vicente Navarro chastised 'post-Marxists' whose proposals for 'a constantly shifting pattern of alliances . . . [were] but a recycling of the old pluralist-interest groups' theories that have been the dominant form of political discourse and practice in the US for many years. The emergence and importance of social movements in the US - the main trademark of US political behaviour and mass mobilization - are a direct consequence of the absence of class-based practices by the dominated

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classes. . . This is not to deny the enormous importance for the left to be sensitive to forms of exploitation other than class exploitation, nor to ignore the importance of establishing coalitions with strata outside the working class. . . . The operational meaning of this awareness is not, however, the mere aggregate of the demands of each component of the 'people'. Class practices are not the mere aggregate of 'interest group' politics. . . . This was, incidentally, the main problem with Jesse Jackson's 'rainbow coalition' . . . with [its] heavy emphasis on the rights of blacks without providing enough linkage with other components of the working class.' 'The 1980 and 1984 Elections and the New Deal', *The Socialist Register 1985/6*, pp. 199–200.

14. Margaret Keck's account of the Workers' Party of Brazil in the 1980s, offers a rich portrait of what this entails in our own time: 'The PT's origins were deeply influenced by the perception of widespread mobilization around social demands in the late 1970s; in the early 1980s, as it became clear that local organization around specific equity demands did not automatically translate into a societal movement, the party was placed in the ambiguous position of having to help organize what it was claiming to represent.' *The Workers' Party and Democratization in Brazil*, New Haven, Yale University Press 1992, p. 242.
15. 'We know that heed must be paid to the institutions, customs and traditions of the various countries, and we do not deny that there are countries, such as America and England, and if I was familiar with its institutions, I might include Holland, where the workers may attain their goals by peaceful means. That being the case, we must recognise that in most continental countries the lever of the revolution will have to be force; a resort to force will be necessary one day to set up the rule of labour'; Speech on the Hague Congress, in David Fernbach (ed.), *Marx: The First International and After*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974, p. 322.
16. See Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, London, Routledge, 1983.
17. Frederick Engels, 1895 Preface to *Marx's The Class Struggles in France*, in *Marx-Engels Selected Works*, Vol. I, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962, p. 135.
18. *The Prophet Armed*, Oxford, OUP, 1954, pp. 338–9.
19. Preface to *The Class Struggles in France*, p. 132.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
21. For an excellent discussion of the unfortunate use made of this in the German SPD, see Guglielmo Carchedi, *Class Analysis and Social Research*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, ch. 1.
22. Karl Man; *The Civil War in France*, in Karl Marx, *The First International and Ajier: Political Writings Volume III*, D. Fernbach (ed.), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974, p. 213.
23. This is the phrase that Ronald Aronson repeats like a mantra throughout his *After Marxism*, New York, Guilford, 1995.
24. John Gray, 'Socialism for the unconverted', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, October 6, 1995.
25. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, London, Michael Joseph, 1994, pp. 564–5.
26. 'Why the Left lost utopia', the *Guardian*, 24 November, 1996.
27. *The Future of Socialism* (1956), New York 1963, pp. 7–16.
28. Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, London, I.B. Taurus, 1996, pp. 558–9.

29. Gabriel Kolko, *Century of War*, New York, New Press, 1995, p. 457.
30. See, e.g., John Cassidy, 'The Next Thinker: The Return of Karl Marx', *The New Yorker*, October 20, 1997, pp. 248–59.
31. Engels wrote to Marx on 23–24 November 1847, just before the London Congress of the Communist League which commissioned Marx to write the Manifesto: 'As more or less history has got to be related in it . . . I am bringing what I have done here [Paris] with me; it is in simple narrative form, but miserably worded, in fearful haste. I begin: What is Communism? And then straight to the proletariat – history of its origin, difference from former labourers, development of the antithesis between proletariat and bourgeoisie, crises, conclusions.' (Marx-Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d., pp. 52–53.)
32. See Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, pp. 289–93; and Michael Kidron and Ronald Segal, *The State of the World Atlas*, London, Penguin, 1995, pp. 28–9.
33. Giovanni Arrighi, 'Marxist Century, American Century: The Making and Remaking of the World Labour Movement', *New Left Review* 179, 1990, pp. 29–63.
34. International Labour Organization, *World Employment 1996/97*, Geneva and Washington, D.C., 1996.
35. A projection of 370 million 'surplus' rural workers by the year 2000 appeared in the *China Daily* on December 2, 1997, citing a report by the State Council issued on June 11, 1997.
36. The Swedish/Swiss engineering transnational corporation, ABB, which between 1990 and 1996 'shed 59,000 jobs in western Europe and North America while creating 56,000 chiefly in Asia and eastern Europe' was as a consequence 'heavily exposed in Asia's tiger economies. Confronted with government decisions to abandon investment projects in the region, [ABB] promptly announced it was laying off 10,000 in western Europe and North America. . .' *Financial Times*, October 24, 1997.
37. As the Manifesto puts it: 'The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which [the bourgeoisie] forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate.'
38. This is a metaphor Marx himself was wont to use, albeit more aptly in relation to Russian agriculture. See Shanin., p. 115.
39. 'Luddism must be seen as arising at the crisis-point in the abrogation of paternalist legislation, and the imposition of the political economy of *laissez-faire* upon, and against the will and conscience of, the working people . . . True enough, much of this paternalist legislation had been in origin not only restrictive, but, for the working man, punitive. Nevertheless, there was within it the shadowy image of a benevolent corporate state, in which there were legislative as well as moral sanctions against the unscrupulous manufacturer or the unjust employer, and in which the journeymen were a recognized 'estate', however low, in the realm. . . These ideals may never have been much more than ideals; by the end of the eighteenth century they may have been threadbare. But they had a powerful reality, none the less, in the notion of what *ought* to be, to which artisans, journeymen, and many small masters appealed.' E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, Penguin, 1968, p. 594.
40. In September 1997 the Russian State Duma reported that life expectancy had fallen far below the levels of other industrialised countries; per capita

consumption of meat, milk and fish had fallen by about a third between **1990** and **1996**, the rate of illness among schoolchildren had increased fivefold and only ten per cent of high-school graduates could be considered healthy, with forty per cent chronically ill. *Toronto Star* September **13, 1997**.

41. In North America, **Engels** wrote, 'each of the two major parties which alternately succeed each other in power is itself in turn controlled by people who make a business of politics, who speculate on seats in the legislative assemblies. . . or who make a living by carrying on agitation for their party and on its victory are rewarded with positions.' Introduction to **Marx's** *The Civil War in France* in Robert C. Tucker (ed), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York, Norton **1972**, p. **535**.
42. Marx, 'Critique of the **Gotha** Programme' ('Marginal Notes on the Programme of the German Workers' Parry'), in Fernbach (ed.), *The First International and After*, p. **356**.
43. Report on Business, *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, **4 December 1997**.
44. Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, London, Verso, **1992**, p. **356**.
45. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, New York, International Publishers, **1947**, p. **39**.
46. James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*, London, Fontana, **1981**.
47. See e.g. Brian McNair, *News and Journalism in the UK*, London, Routledge **1994**; Douglas Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, Boulder, Westview **1990**.
48. For rich analyses of existing and possible ways of restoring the media to democracy see James Curran, 'Mass Media and Democracy Revisited' in J. Curran and P. Gourevitch, eds., *Mass Media and Society*, London, Arnold, **1996**; and Don Hazen and Julie Winokur (eds.), *We the Media: A Citizen's Guide to Fighting For Media Democracy*, New York, The New Press, **1997**.
49. On citizens' juries see John Stewart, Elizabeth Kendall and Anna Coote, *Citizens' Juries*, London, IPPR **1994**. On the idea of a socialised market see Diane Elson, 'Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market?,' *New Left Review*, **172, 1988**. On the GLC and democratic 'deepening' in a Swedish women's education centre, see Hilary Wainwright *Arguments for a New Left*, Oxford, Blackwell, **1994**, chapters **5** to **7**; On democratic management in the workplace and the state, see respectively, Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, *Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century*, Boston, South End Press, **1991**, and Gregory Albo, David Langille, and Leo Panitch, eds., *A Different Kind of State: Popular Power and Democratic Administration*, Toronto, Oxford, **1993**.
50. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx, *Survey from Exile: Political Writings: Volume II*, D. Fernbach (ed), London, Penguin, **1973**, p. **148**.
51. See Leo Panitch, 'Capitalism, Socialism and Revolution: The Contemporary Meaning of Revolution in the West,' *Socialist Register* **1989**, London, Merlin, **1989**.
52. In addition to Moss, *infra*, see FL Bender's excellent introduction to his edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, New York, Norton, **1988**, esp. pp. **3-4**.
53. Frederick Engels, Preface to the **1888** English edition of the Manifesto, in Bender, ed. p. **47**. His claim that lessons had been learned, coinciding as it did with the rise of industrial unionism and mass working class parties, was quite valid.
54. The measures were advanced as only 'generally applicable': they would be 'different in different countries'. And when Marx and Engels a quarter of a century later wrote their first preface to the Manifesto (for the **1872** German

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edition), they insisted that 'no special stress' should be laid on the measures proposed, and that the whole 'passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today.' See Bender., p. 43.

55. See William Greider, 'Saving the Local Economy', *The Nation*, 15 December 1997 as well as the declaration and memorandum by 25 European economists, *Full Employment, Social Cohesion and Equity for Europe: Alternatives to Competitive Austerity*, May 1997. In the Socialist Register, among others essays, see especially Jim Crotty and Gerald Epstein, 'In Defence of Capital Controls' *Socialist Register 1996*, London, Merlin, 1996.
56. Gregory Albo, 'A World Market of Opportunities? Capitalist Obstacles and Left Economic Policy', *Socialist Register 1997*, esp. pp. 27–39.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
58. The text actually says 'leading civilized countries'. **Without** wishing to burke the question of how far **Marx's** use of **Hegel's** concept of 'world-historical' nations (in which the principle of 'freedom' had been most fully realised, etc.) involved assumptions of a racialist nature, we have omitted the word 'civilized' in the quotation in order to focus on the main point, which remains valid – the need for **joint** action by the leading or major economic powers.
59. Engels, Preface to the 1888 English edition, in Bender, ed., p. 48.
60. Preface to the 1883 German edition in Bender, ed., pp. 45–6.
61. E.P. Thompson, 'An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', *The Socialist Register 1973*, London, Merlin, 1973, pp. 84 and 99–100 n. 69.
62. **Marx's** observations on the contemporary study of social and economic history are worth recalling: 'Much research has been carried out to trace the different historical phases that the bourgeoisie has passed through.. . But when it is a question of making a precise study of strikes, combinations and other forms in which the proletarians carry out before our eyes their organisation **as** a class, some are seized with real fear and others display a *transcendental* disdain.' *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956, p. 196.
63. Quoted in Bender's introduction to the Manifesto., p. 10.