

# HEZBOLLAH'S VICTORY IN LEBANON:



**NEW LEFT Journal**

Issue 2 Winter 2006 €3



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Hezbollah the real story  
Socialists and National liberation***

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# Editorial

The defeat of Israel by the resistance in Lebanon, at the end of August, was of enormous significance. A guerrilla army forced the fifth most powerful army in the world to withdraw. The fall-out from this has rocked Israel's main backer, the US. It is now sending thousands of dollars to the PLO in an attempt to stem the spread of Hezbollah's popular support to Hamas. The war on Iraq is lurching from crisis to crisis. Recent revelations that Iraq's death toll has reached 655,000 – twenty times the official US estimate – has only dented further the credibility of both Bush and Blair.

This issue of NLJ examines the politics of resistance in relation to Hezbollah and the nature of the state of Israel – and argues that an understanding of both is crucial to a solution in the Middle East. We also look at the socialist tradition and the fight for national liberation. In the past, those on the Irish left would have been very familiar with this debate. Today, new resistance movements have replaced old-style nationalists and thrown many into confusion about anti-imperialism under the banner of Islam.

Religion has often been the rallying point for struggles against empire and we should not allow the racist slurs from the neo-cons and New Labour to divide the anti-war movement in the way they would like. The clear stand of unconditionally supporting those fighting imperialism – in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and possibly in Iran – while also pointing out that war is a product not just of western values but of the global capitalist system as a whole, will be key for the continued strength of the movement.

The FF-PD government, too, is showing its true grim colours. Besides lending Shannon to the war on Iraq, it continues to arrogantly assert its god-given right to be in government. The Shell to Sea campaign, despite massive popular support, has been treated disgracefully by heavy-handed gardai while Bertie's bribe money has been dismissed, by various polls and in the media, as being really nothing of importance after all. Both issues raise questions of accountability, of "spin", of democracy.

We argue here that the democratic deficit has become part and parcel of the neoliberal world order, and how the Irish state has become, despite the hands-off rhetoric, the tool of global capital. This explains how the richest 10% at the top can increase its share of the national income at the expense of everyone else. It also accounts for the fact that the state spends so little on health, welfare or pension payments and that Irish social transfers are among the lowest in the OECD. This disgraceful fact and the Irish government's position on the war should rock the cosy Irish consensus of tweedledum-tweedledee coalitions.

Anti-war and anti-privatisation activists, local campaigners and socialists need to combine to put these issues at the top of the agenda in the election campaign ahead.

# Neoliberalism, Democracy and the State



By Kieran Allen

Cut taxes and privatise – this is the core of neoliberalism. But how exactly do the neoliberals view the state? On the one hand, they present it as a great bureaucracy that restricts individual enterprise but on the other they want a strong state, which curbs union activity and builds up its repressive apparatus. Michael McDowell, for example, constantly demands less interference in the market but he also wants identity cards for migrants and greater use of the Public Order Act against protestors.

The roots of the neoliberal approach to the state can be traced back to Frederick Hayek, who began his intellectual career working with Ludwig von Mises, the Austrian economist who polemicised against the idea of socialist planning. Hayek focused on the manner in which economic knowledge and information could be disseminated in society. Could any central authority, he asked, possibly accumulate all the fragmented bits of knowledge possessed by individuals? The answer to this false rhetorical question, was of course, no.

Hayek then conceived of the market 'as a system for the utilization of knowledge, which no one can possess as a whole'.<sup>i</sup> Only the market could overcome the fragmentation of knowledge by sending out price signals that indicated where investment was needed or where there was an abundance or scarcity of goods. Once this premise was accepted, there was little room for any political authority to intervene in the economy.

"It reduces the possible task of authority very much if you realize

that the market has in that sense a superiority, because the amount of information the authorities can use is always very limited, and the market always uses an infinitely greater amount of information than the authorities can ever do."<sup>ii</sup>

Hayek moved to the London School of Economics in the 1931 and engaged in vigorous debates with Keynes. In 1944, he published his classic text, *The Road to Serfdom* which argued that Nazism was not a reaction to socialism but rather an outgrowth of 'collectivism'. By that he meant a tendency towards greater state control, which both Keynes and the social democratic left had advocated. The alternative to both was individualism and the rule of law. Laws needed to be fixed and announced beforehand in order to effect the necessary constraints on government and create the ensuing space for individual liberty. At the heart of Hayek's philosophy was a deep suspicion of democratic rule. He wrote:

"We have no intention, however, of making a fetish of democracy. It may well be that our generation talks and thinks too much of democracy and too little of the values it serves... Democracy is essentially a means, a utilitarian device for safeguarding internal peace and individual freedom. As such it is by no means infallible or certain."<sup>iii</sup>

Hayek saw no intrinsic value in people coming together discussing, debating and making decisions for a common good. His

suspicion of democracy harked back to fears initially raised by the French aristocrat de Tocqueville in the nineteenth century: if the poor have the vote and if they are more numerous, might they not decide to limit the wealth of the few? Later in *Law, Legislation and Liberty* Hayek was even more explicit in arguing that:

"The predominant model of liberal democratic institution, in which the same representative body lays down the rules of just conduct and directs government, necessarily leads to a gradual transformation of the spontaneous order of a free society into a totalitarian system conducted in the service of some coalition of organised interests."<sup>iv</sup>

His aim, therefore, was to reduce the 'politicisation' of society in order to keep public action to a minimum. In this way the 'spontaneous order' of the market could be given a free reign. These anti-democratic instincts were expressed most clearly in Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* where he argued that while universal suffrage seemed to be the best arrangement in Western society, "this does not prove that it is required by some basic principle".<sup>v</sup>

He claimed that the limits on suffrage are largely determined by matters of expediency and he seemed to have little difficulty with suggestions that only people over forty or income earners might have a vote. He explicitly argued that: "it is also possible for a reasonable person to argue that the ideals of democracy would be better served if, say, all servants of government or all recipients of public charity

were excluded from the vote”.vi His key concern was to limit the scope of decision-making through a constitution which hemmed in the areas on which a democratic government could decide matters.vii

## **Antidemocratic state**

This anti-democratic approach has been at the heart of neoliberalism ever since. The fundamental aim of the market fundamentalists of today is to reduce the scope of democratic participation in society to a mere formality – so that corporations have the freedom to increase their wealth. Far from minimising the role of the state, they want a more bureaucratic state that becomes the complete handmaiden for capital. A number of techniques are typically employed to bring this about.

The first is a growth in the power of the executive over parliament. Bush’s ‘war on terrorism’ provides the cover by which this important change is promoted. Today a relatively small clique around Bush takes many of the key decisions in the US by simply issuing executive orders which Bush simply signs. Before Bush arrived the first forty-two presidents of the US combined, had signed an executive order less than six hundred times. Bush by contrast, signed eight hundred such orders in the first six years of his presidency. His more notorious orders included sanction for the use of torture.

However, this shift in decision-making is by no means confined to Bush’s America nor is it directly linked to the war against terrorism. In Ireland after the passing of the Waste Management (Amendment) Act 2001, the power to adopt or reject a local waste management plan was removed from elected councillors and transferred to city or county managers. Henceforth managers could overrule objections to bin charges or incinerators. It was one of the most serious attacks on the democratic rights of the majority of citizens which the state has imposed.

One of the first effects of the new measure was seen when elected councillors on Dublin City Council voted to have all refuse – including that of non-payers – collected in the interests of public health. However, in line with the new Waste Management Act, the councillors were simply told by unelected officials that the ‘The vote means nothing. We’re going to continue on as we have been’.viii

## **Public bodies**

Another key feature of the neo-liberal state has been the transfer of greater powers to unelected semi-autonomous public bodies. ‘Governance’ is a term that has come into vogue to describe an apparent de-centralisation of state authority to a multitude of quasi-governmental institutions.

A study by the left leaning TASC think tank revealed that there were somewhere in excess of 450 public bodies at the end of 2005. In the first category belong executive bodies such as the Health Services Executive, which controls a budget of 12 billion per year and whose activities mean that the Department of Health has been reduced to smaller more general policy making unit. A similar executive function is played by the National Roads Authority

and the Environmental Protection Agency.

In another category belong advisory bodies which often have a significant input into policy making. These include bodies such as the Food Safety Authority or the Enterprise Strategy Group which are charged with mapping the future direction of Irish industrial policy. Finally, there are a host of ad hoc ‘taskforces’ that are charged with producing recommendations on a number of specific issues. Ireland now has a ratio of one public body for every 5,000 people, which is almost the same as the ratio of one elected representative at national or local level for every 4,000 people.ix

Up to half of these public bodies have come into existence in the last ten years but despite a constant refrain about ‘openness and transparency’, they are often very slow to share information on their decision making process. The HSE, for example, is notorious for suppressing information – as it did on the Leas Cross report. Some of these public bodies are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act and in the particular case of Coillte, the state forestry company, deliberately claim reasons of ‘commercial secrecy’ to hide their activities from the public.x

Not all of these public bodies have an equal impact on decision-making and some are far more important than others. It is noticeable that corporate influence appears to grow the more the public bodies discuss issues that are closer to its concerns. A number of examples illustrate this.

Any proposed policy changes to do with the Irish Financial Services Centre is channelled directly through the Department of the Taoiseach and a special IFSC Clearing House group has been formed to advise on changes. The composition of this Clearing House Group is totally dominated by the representatives of large corporations. It is composed of groupings such as AIB Capital markets, Bank of Ireland, Merrill Lynch Capital markets, State Street International, the legal firms which service these types of compa-

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nies and top state officials. There are no representatives of the trade unions, NGOs or poverty groupings to propose ways in which a levy could be placed on some of these huge financial transactions to bring greater benefit to Irish society.

One of the key advisory groups on migration policy is the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). It is chaired by a director of Computer Placement Resources Plc, one of the largest recruitment and outsourcing agencies in the state and its board includes the Training and Communications Manager of Waterford Wedgwood, the Human Resources Director of Cement Roadstone Holdings, the Government and Human Affairs manager of Hewlett-Packard, the Managing Director of Arkon as well as one IBEC representative, two trade unionists and a number of public officials.

Few people have heard of the EGFSN but it works with FAS in detailed manpower planning. Rather bizarrely in a society that promotes market forces, it employs what can only be described as Soviet style planning methods to ascertain how many mushroom pickers or plumbers will be required in the coming years. The level of detail can be astounding. By 2008, for example, it is suggested that Ireland will need an extra 600 mushroom pickers, 30 propagation workers for plant nurseries and 50 food technology agronomists.xi The group advocates policies that treat migrants as simple economic units that are at the disposal of business. It argues for example, that ministers, ‘should retain discretionary powers to either refuse or cancel permanent residency’.xii Yet many of its recommendations have found their way into legislation.

The Enterprise Strategy Group has played a key role in developing Ireland’s industrial strategy. Its document on ‘Ahead of the Curve’ sets the framework that guides much of government policy in this area. Its calls for a continuation of the ‘attractive tax regime’; a new strategy to commercialise research in higher education; extra funds to encourage business networks and, bizarrely, special cabinet meetings twice a year on entrepreneurship to which four senior business people will be invited. However, these pro-business recommendations are hardly surprising when you consider its composition. It is made up of the managing directors of Wyeth, Combilift Ltd, Delta Partners, Masonite Ireland, Eurostyle Ltd, Aderra Limited, the CEO of the Kerry Group and Zalco Investment; the Chief Risk Officer of the AIB; a Vice President of Dell; five pro-business academics and one former trade union official.

Other more sectional bodies also reveal a strong corporate influence. The Taskforce on the Mushroom Industry is composed entirely of representatives of the mushroom producers, state officials, a consultant and an IFA figure. There are huge concerns in trade union circles about low wages that are paid to migrant workers and health and safety standards within the industry but there is no trade unionist on the taskforce. The Dublin Docklands Development Authority is responsible for one of the most lucrative pieces of proper-

ty in the Celtic Tiger that also happens to border poor inner city areas. The Board is composed of a representative of Anglo-Irish bank, McKinsey & Co Inc, Alexsam Corporate Finance, Byrne Curtin Kelly, OHM Group Arup Consulting Engineers, Interactive



Power without accountability: The International Monetary Fund

Project Managers and a top civil servant. There are no representatives of local working-class communities.

These examples reveal an extraordinary level of corporate influence. But there is one other crucial way in which government policy-making is being outsourced.

### Business Consultants

In the seven years between before 2005, the Irish government spent 174 million on consultants' reports.<sup>xiii</sup> Some of the money went on publicity campaigns as the state embraced a style of glossy packaging of information that had long been cherished by corporations. Some was spent on 'business management systems' that were often related to information technology projects. But a considerable amount was also spent on buying expert advice from supposedly independent sources.

However, there is nothing independent about the consultancy services provided by firms such as Deloitte and Touche or Goldman Sachs. Goldman Sachs, for example, was originally brought in by the government to give 'independent' advice on the future of Aer Lingus and, lo and behold, it recommended a form of privatisation. The fact that this same firm had made a fortune from the privatisation of Eircom and would eventually buy shares in Aer Lingus when it was privatised was of course entirely 'co-incidental'. The extensive use of consultants is another way by which neoliberal governments de-politicise decision making and render it a seemingly technical exercise where no democratic input is possible.

These shifts in the nature of the state have important implications for socialists. When imperialists try to cover their warmongering by claiming to promote democracy, socialists often quite rightly point to their inconsistencies. Why do they say they champion democracy – but then not recognise the right of the people of Palestine or Algeria to elect Islamic parties? Why does the US talk about democracy and then give \$500 million in aid to Uzbekistan? But as well as addressing the inconsistencies, we also need to show how our rulers favour only the most formal type of 'democracy' which is a thin veneer for the dictatorship of corporations. They see democracy only as a useful technique to legitimise existing holders of power. It is reduced to an electoral contest every four

years between parties who are entirely dependent on corporate funding.

But there is another important implication. If the scope of even parliamentary democracy is being reduced in a neo-liberal society, then how can change really come about? In 1852, Karl Marx not only advocated universal suffrage but also suggested that it would inevitably result in the 'political supremacy of the working class'. By that he meant that voting would give workers a peaceful way of taking power. However twenty years later Marx had changed his mind. Writing in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, he stated that 'one thing was proved by the Commune, viz., that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machine and wield it for its own purpose' but would have to smash it.

The reason was that the granting of universal suffrage was accompanied by a growth in the bureaucratic military apparatus of the state. The more workers got the vote, the more decision making within the state migrated to areas that were immune from democratic influence. The neoliberal turn has accelerated that process enormously and any who thinks that genuine socialism could be instituted by a vote in parliament is entirely deluded.

The key to all serious change today is therefore mass mobilisation and mass direct action. The most effective of such actions are when workers wield their vast economic power. When the power of the corporations have become so centralised, they have to be met with a greater force that can disrupt their dominance. That can only come in the form of 'people power' where thousands take part in mass collective actions to disrupt the functioning of capital.

Sometimes, of course, actions don't start with thousands but with relatively sizeable minorities influenced by activists. These minority actions can be inspiring but if they are to win they need to form part of a strategy of mobilising greater numbers. The actions of hundreds of protestors in blocking Shell's refinery in North Mayo or the attempted de-commissioning of Raytheon by Derry anti-war activist during the war on Lebanon show how struggles increasingly overstep the limits of official society. These actions spring from open democratic debate and arise from real

movements that have built roots on the ground. But they also call out for further escalation if they are to be successful.

Some, however, advocate more conspiratorial forms of direct action because they believe that the mass of

the population have become brainwashed by consumerism. So calls for mass demonstration are dismissed as 'boring' while the prospect of mobilising vast numbers is derided in favour of the actions of the brave few. The ironic thing is that such a concept of direct action fits neatly with a reformist approach because it suggests that no real systemic change is possible.

Marxists by contrast start with the existing world and analyse its contradictions to locate the springs of revolt. From this perspective, neoliberalism is bringing dramatic changes that weaken the connections that our rulers had to their own populations. As we have seen, their mode of rule increasingly relies on repression rather than consent. With these changes has come the prospect of socialists winning a mass influence in ways that have not been seen in decades. They should use that influence not just to channel grievances back into the safe and futile channels of parliamentary democracy – but to use any elected position to promote change from outside parliament by means of mass direct action.

i A. Ebenstein, *Hayek's Journey: The Mind of Friedrich Hayek*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) p 96.

ii *ibid*

iii F. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, (London: Routledge, 1997) p 52.

iv F. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty: Vol. 1, Rules and Order*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) p. 2.

v F. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, (London, New York: Routledge 1993) p 105

vi *ibid*

vii N. Bosanquet, *After the New Right*, (Aldershot, Heinemann 1984) p. 39

viii O Kelly, 'City Ruling on refuse dismissed', *Irish Times*, 2 March 2005

ix P. Clancy and G. Murphy, *Outsourcing Government: Public Bodies and Accountability* (Dublin: Tasc/New Island 2000) p 17

x Office of Information Commissioner, *Annual Report 2005* (Dublin: Office of Information Commissioner 2006) p 28

xi *ibid* p 91

xii *ibid* p 141

xiii M Brennock, *Government routinely seeks external advice*; *Irish Times* 8 October 2005

# Zionism and the Israeli State

By Deirdre Cronin

The bombing of Southern Lebanon is yet another brutal chapter in the Israeli terrorisation of the region's Arab population. It is a frightening reminder that Israel can act with impunity in the area, directed and supported by its imperialist sponsor, the US. Since its beginnings in 1948, the Zionist, Israeli state has promoted violence and discrimination against the Palestinian people

In the Occupied Territories today, over 3 million Palestinians face daily checkpoints and blockades which have had a devastating effect on daily life and on the economy. 40% of the adult population is currently unemployed while two thirds of the population live below the poverty line. Yet life is set to deteriorate further with the construction of what is known as the "apartheid wall". Costing \$3.4 billion to construct, when completed it will annex almost 50% of the West Bank. Built ostensibly for security purposes, the wall will conveniently include 98% of the Israeli settler population – currently illegally located on this land – on the 'Israeli' side of the wall. Nearly 16% of Palestinians will be trapped in the annexed areas. The wall will separate Palestinians from their land, their workplaces and their schools and colleges. Despite the International Court of Justice ruling in 2004 that the wall violated international law and its construction should be ended, work on it has continued apace. The US government has since provided \$100 million for high-tech gates and checkpoints.

Palestinians daily face ritual humiliation. They are denied basic freedom of movement and live under the threat of abuse by Israeli security forces, both of which have intensified since the war on Lebanon, according to human rights sources. In the West Bank, there are 40 permanently staffed checkpoints with 15 more staffed intermittently. In addition, there are checkpoints along the Green Line and there are final checkpoints between the West Bank and the actual Israeli border. However, Palestinians also find their movements restricted by 450 physical obstructions – mounds of dirt, concrete blocks, trenches and gates. Surprise checkpoints are also mounted – 216 in the week starting August 2nd 2006, for example. Below are two incidents of many that occurred over the summer that help to illustrate the dangers for ordinary Palestinians.

Border Police officers beat Jawdat Gheith, 52, unconscious in front of his wife and children, Beit 'Awa checkpoint, 26 June 2006

Jawdat Gheith was travelling with his wife and six children (aged nine months to fourteen years) in his car to visit relatives

in Beit 'Awa. He was not familiar with the road and mistakenly entered a road forbidden to Palestinian traffic, a road that was for settlers only. When he got to the checkpoint at the entrance to Beit 'Awa, the border policemen at the checkpoint stopped him. They pulled him out of the car and punched him and hit him with the butts of their rifles and kicked him – all in front of his wife and children who remained in the



Fortified settlement on occupied land

car. After beating him for about ten minutes, he lost consciousness. He woke up in a hospital in Hebron a few hours later.

Soldiers beat and abuse Mater Khamaiseh, a vegetable dealer from Jenin, near the 'Anabta checkpoint, 1 August 2006

Mater Khamaiseh was on his way back to Jenin from the vegetable market in Beita, a village south of Nablus. He knew that the army did not allow Jenin residents to cross the 'Anabta checkpoint, which is situated east of Tulkarm, so he bypassed the checkpoint. As he was driving, an army jeep with four soldiers inside stopped him. The soldiers removed him from the truck and led him to a nearby olive grove, where one of the soldiers fired a long volley of bullets over his head for no reason at all. Then the soldiers beat him all over his body, punching him and hitting him with their rifle butts, and kicking him. In his testimony, Khamaiseh said: "The blows really hurt ... More than once I thought they were about to kill me." One of the soldiers shot him in the hand and a single shot to his stomach. He later managed to drive to Jenin and went to the hospital for treatment.

Between 2000 and 2005 there were 261 investigations of violent and abusive treatment by Israeli security forces in the West Bank – the prosecution rate is less than 10%.

On every level in society, Palestinians are denied basic rights. More than 80% of the water from the West Bank goes to Israel leaving Palestinians facing water short-

ages. They are prohibited by the Israeli government from drilling new wells or rehabilitating old ones. Meanwhile Jewish settlers in the occupied territories have unmetered access to water, they benefit from more advanced pump technology and use as much as ten times more water per capita than Palestinians.

The abuses in the Occupied Territories have been the subject of condemnation by international bodies like the UN. However the Israeli state has chosen to ignore all resolutions, without sanction from governments across the globe. Instead Israel is held up as a beacon of democracy in the region. Yet a quick investigation into the position of the 1.3 million Arabs living within Israel demonstrates that even within its own borders this state is incapable of functioning as a democracy.

One recent illustration is provided by Masada, an advocacy centre for Arabs in Israel founded in 1997. When an apartment block in Haifa, Northern Israel was hit by Hezbollah rockets government officials were interviewed in front of the rubble. Yet once the photo opportunity was over they left this Arab neighbourhood and it took three days before families who had been left with no homes were contacted, by which time an asbestos problem and a broken sewage system were causing havoc for the local population. Eighteen Arabs in Northern Israel were killed during the war in Lebanon, constituting 44% of civilian casualties in Israel.

While the Israeli government continued to attack Lebanon in order to "defend" itself, it failed to acknowledge that the part of its citizenship under most threat was the very same part that had no siren systems in many of their Arab villages, in over half of whose schools there were no bomb shelters and 30% of whom had no refuge in the case of an attack. Over 120 million NIS (Israeli currency) was allocated to Galilee by the Ministry for Internal Affairs after the war, despite the fact that 50% of its localities are Arab they received just 29% of the money.

This is just a brief illustration of the discrimination and exclusion of Arabs that goes to the heart of the Israeli state and which reflects the true nature of a state that was created exclusively to serve the needs of the Jewish people on land that belonged to someone else.

## The origins of the Israeli state

Zionism emerged as an ideology in the late nineteenth century. At the heart of it was the idea that Jews, who were scattered across the globe, needed their own homeland. The movement was led by Theodor

Herzl and emerged at a time when vicious anti-Semitism was rife, particularly in Eastern Europe where many Jews lived. However, despite this, ordinary Jewish people were very slow to ally themselves with Herzl. In fact many Jews at this time were active in the Bund, a socialist organisation where the cultural and national rights of minorities were promoted. By the end of World War One just 56,000 Jews had settled in Palestine.

The idea that the Jews had found “a land without people for a people without land” was a central myth of Zionism. Palestine was in reality already inhabited by an Arab population that was mostly Muslim, with a sizeable Christian minority and a smaller Jewish population who had all lived on the same land for 1,300 years.

The Zionist leadership had realised from early on that if the dream of a Jewish homeland in Palestine were to come to fruition then imperialist backing would be required. They first approached the very Tsar who had ordered pogroms against the Jewish population and then the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. However, it was only in the early twentieth century that Britain, who controlled much of the Middle East, became the most likely candidate to back Zionism and so Lord Balfour was approached.

The idea was attractive to the British imperialists for two reasons. Firstly, World War One demonstrated that oil was the key to the future. It was said at the time that the allies had “floated to victory on a wave of oil” and the Zionists could now play a useful role in helping the British secure its base in the oil rich region. Secondly, it dovetailed with the racist anti-Semitic policies that Balfour himself had spearheaded. In 1905 he introduced the Aliens Act that was framed to keep growing numbers of Jews out of Britain and was therefore very open to cooperating with Zionism to facilitate a Jewish exit from mainland Europe. In November 1917 the Balfour Declaration was signed and Zionist Settlers began to arrive in Palestine in larger numbers.

However it was not until after the atrocity of the Holocaust that Jews began to come in great numbers. Many at the time sought refuge in Great Britain and the United States but were refused, so the journey to Israel for many was an escape to a

destination of last resort.

The decline of the British Empire after World War Two led to Britain’s withdrawal from Palestine. The UN, at the behest of the now dominant US, drew up a partition plan for the area in 1947. It signalled the birth of the Zionist Israeli state and unleashed a terror on the Arab population that continues today. The UN plan itself granted the Jewish population, which constituted 30% of the total, 55% of the land, of which the Jewish settlers had previously owned 6%. The obvious injustice was nothing compared with what was to follow.

As the British withdrew, the Nakbah

Discrimination and racism exist today at every level of society as illustrated by the areas examined below:

## Land ownership

Under the 1950 Absentee Property Law, most Arabs lost their land and their homes. This law allowed the Israeli state to confiscate any property from which its owner had been absent. This means that the hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced Palestinians have no claim on their property.

Today, 93% of the land in Israel is defined as “Israel lands” and is owned

either directly by the state, the Development Authority or the Jewish National Fund. This land is then leased predominantly to Jewish citizens. Arabs own about 3.5% of the land in Israel but are severely restricted in land use by regulations and planning laws. Although the Arab population in Israel tripled (compared to the Jewish population) there has not been one new Arab settlement or village built.



Galilee October 1948, Ethnically Cleansed Palestinians on their way to Lebanon.

(Catastrophe) occurred. Referred to in Israel as the War of Independence, it involved the ethnic cleansing of three quarters of a million Arabs and aimed to promote and guarantee the abiding aim of Israel to this day – that it will forever be a Jewish state for a Jewish people. By the end of the War of Independence, Zionist forces occupied 78% of Palestine. More than 400 Arab communities were systematically destroyed and in cities like Jaffa and Haifa all Arab life ceased. Refugees fled to Gaza, the West Bank and the neighbouring states of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Palestine became three entities – the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Israeli State.

160,000 Palestinians remained within Israel – today that figure stands at 1.3 million and their treatment tells us a lot about the nature of the Israeli state.

## The plight of Israeli Arabs

The Declaration of Independence in 1948 defined Israel as both a Jewish and a democratic state. Yet the two are incompatible because Jews must form the majority in the state, and Jews are entitled to special treatment and preferential laws which automatically makes the Arab population second class citizens. Though the Palestinians who remained in Israel became citizens of the state they were placed under military rule until 1966.

There are hundreds of new exclusively Jewish towns, villages and settlements. A deliberate policy of Judaisation has been promoted which encourages Jews to move into what were previously Arab areas. One in ten of the Arab population lives in unofficial villages that are denied basic social services and live under constant threat of demolition.

## Citizenship

Under the 1950 Law of Return every Jew in the world is given the right to Israeli citizenship. A Jew is defined as anyone with one Jewish grandparent. In contrast, Palestinians forced out of their homes have no right of return, no right to compensation and no right of resettlement. Since 2002, it has been effectively impossible for Palestinians from the occupied territories to acquire citizenship upon marrying an Israeli.

## Social Welfare

Only people who have completed military service are entitled to full social welfare benefits. As most Arabs are not permitted to join the army they cannot access a full range of social services. In the area of state spending, Arabs are severely discriminated against. Taking the area of education as an example, the Israeli government in 2004 spent \$105 per year on each Arab stu-

dent compared to £485 on each Jewish pupil in secular state schools.

## Political Representation

Israeli Arabs have the right to vote and there are ten members in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, representing specifically Arab parties. However a law passed in 1985 prohibits parties from running in elections if they are opposed "to the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people". This means that a political voice is denied completely to those who desire a state that would be for all its citizens equally.

## Work

Huge areas of employment are off limits for Israeli Arabs on 'security grounds'. This includes large swathes of the civil service and most of the state-run utilities. Instead, Arabs, even those most highly qualified, end up in construction, farm work or factories, employed only on a casual basis. Just 1% of university lecturers are Arabs

The Israeli state is racist and discriminatory to its core. At every level, Arab citizens are denied the same rights as the Jewish majority. Subjected to constant harassment and a denial of their history and traditions they are barely tolerated within Israeli society. Thorough-going separation from the Arab population in all walks of life, in housing and in most employment, means that even among Jewish workers – who do face neoliberal attacks like all workers across the globe – there is little opportunity to bridge the gulf that exists. While there is wage inequality, poverty and unemployment within the Israeli Jewish community, even the poorest are substantially better off than their Arab counterparts.

While there is potential for, and there has been, social conflict within the Israeli state, to a large degree the actual experience of living on Arab land makes Israelis vulnerable to ultimately allying with their state for protection and security. Israeli Jews are required to do military service and take a front line position in imposing the vicious regime outlined above on their fellow Palestinian citizens. As the refuseniks and the peace movement illus-

trates there are many Jews who do want an accommodation with their Arab neighbours but making a clear break with Zionism is very difficult under these circumstances. Even those on the Israeli left have found it difficult to make this ideological leap of faith.

## Israel the watchdog state

Right from its beginnings, the Zionist movement recognised the importance of imperialist sponsorship and today it is the backing of the US state that is crucial to the existence of the Israeli terrorist state. The 1948 War was only the first in a series of land grabs and challenges to the surrounding Arab populations. In a series of military occupations in 1956 (Sinai and Gaza), in 1967 (the West bank) and in 1982 (Lebanon), Israel proved its worth as the watchdog for US imperialism, a watchdog that also had the ability to intervene directly itself on behalf of its superpower sponsor.

In 1959, the first military aid came through. Today, the US provides aid to the tune of approximately \$3 billion per year – \$1.2 billion in economic aid and \$1.8 billion in military aid. This figure represents about one-sixth of total U.S. foreign aid, but the true figure is much higher with additional programmes approved every year from other Departments. The flooding of Israel with this aid has bolstered the power of the Zionists and cushions the state from internal protests.

Israel's importance to the US is at an all time high. Using the terrorist threat as its pretext it has set its sights on dominating the Middle East to an extent never achieved before. The invasion of Lebanon by Israel early this summer was an illustration of the hope that Israeli power can be utilised to the best strategic advantage to allow the US to take on Iran and Syria and the rest of the Arab world. The power of Hezbollah, however, illustrates that, despite its wealth and military strength, Israel looks weak in the face of a well-organised opposition and a population united in resistance.

## The future

Peace in the Middle East can only be

achieved when there is justice for the Palestinian people. This means they must be afforded the right of return. If this were to be conceded it would mean the end of the Zionist majority within the Israeli state and the end as such of the Zionist state. A 'two state solution' fails to deal with this injustice that lies at the heart of the conflict. A two state solution would involve an Israeli state armed to the teeth with conventional and nuclear weapons existing side by side with a weak Palestinian one. This is an empty dream. A state in which Jew, Muslim and Christian lives as equals would be a true beacon for democracy but it is not something advocated by the US or any other Western governments.

The Palestinians lack the power of the black working class in South Africa and so the key to change must lie with Arabs across the region who in many states have seen their own leaders become lackeys of US imperialism. The emergence of resistance movements fuelled not only by solidarity with the Palestinian cause but also now at the occupation of Iraq, signal the possibilities for huge upheavals in the region and a mobilisation against the corrupt Arab governments and the racist Israeli state.

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## Recommended reading

Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine; One Land Two Peoples* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Susan Nathan, *The Other side of Israel* (Harper Collins, 2005)

John Rose, *Israel: The Hijack State* (Socialist Worker pamphlet)

John Rose, *The Myths of Zionism* (Pluto Press, 2004)

Websites

[www.IPSC.ie](http://www.IPSC.ie) Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign

[www.arabhra.org](http://www.arabhra.org) Arab Association of Human Rights inside Israel

[www.alternativenews.org](http://www.alternativenews.org) Website run by Palestinians and Israelis from Jerusalem and Bethlehem

[www.mossawacenter.org](http://www.mossawacenter.org) An advocacy centre for Arab Israeli citizens



# Hezbollah – the real story



**By Owen McCormack**

Hezbollah's origins go back to the 1970s when the Movement of the Disinherited was formed, by a leading Shia cleric, Imam Musa al Sadr. The Movement were based among the Southern Shia who were suffering most from Israeli bombing raids (supposedly in retaliation for PLO attacks). The group's stated aim was to champion all of Lebanon's deprived and seek social justice and reform of the corrupt political system left by the French.

The ensuing savage civil war saw the formation of AMAL headed by Nabih Berri, while the more Islamic sections broke away to form the nucleus of Hezbollah around the cleric, Abbas al-Musawi. While continuing the tradition of fighting social injustice, the group had one overriding aim: to fight the Israeli state and its collaborators. For Musawi the Israeli state was the source of the continuing humiliation of all Arabs. Their language was of heretics and infidels but their aim was to oppose Israeli military attacks which they saw as part of US imperialism in the region.

Musawi had studied at the leading Shia seminary in Najaf in Iraq where Ayatollah Khomeini and Sayed Fadlallah had also studied. He gathered other leading clerics from the south around him. The Iranian revolution in 1979, which overthrew the Shah and saw Khomeini installed as the head of an Islamic state, had a profound radicalising effect on many of them.

The Israeli invasion and occupation of South Lebanon radicalised thousands of the poorest Shia in the villages of the south and in Beirut and it was this that swelled Hezbollah's numbers.

## Israel Invades

The Israeli invasion, masterminded by Ariel Sharon, had the stated aim of destroying the remnants of the PLO based in Lebanon. The invasion and occupation stoked further civil war and led to the massacre of thousands of Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila by Phalangists (a Christian Fascist militia) aided and guided by the IDF.

For many in the Arab world these massacres proved the ultimate humiliation. They targeted defenceless men, women and children and it seemed that there was no force that could respond to this outrage. Hezbollah leaders would later point to these attacks as a turning point that convinced them to take up arms.

The US put Hezbollah on its wanted list since this time. It blamed it for the attacks on the US marines and French troops in Beirut in 1983, in which over 243 marines and dozens of French troops were killed. The suicide missions shattered the confidence of the western powers who had intervened to prop up the failing Christian/Phalange government. Hezbollah has always denied direct involvement but Sayed Fadlallah was quick to justify the attacks. It seems probable that the attacks

were carried out by Shias who would later become members of Hezbollah.

For the Shia in the south, the invasion and occupation was a catastrophe. Over 20,000 died during the occupation.

The Israelis armed and recruited a mercenary force to police the area. The Southern Lebanese Army (SLA) was made up of the former fascist Phalange and Christians. They forced local men to join under threat of execution or reprisals against their villages. They tried to impose a tax on villages to pay for the formation of the SLA. Israeli special branch agents (Shin Bet) roamed freely in death squads shooting those accused of harbouring resistance fighters or for refusing to join the SLA. SLA brutality came to match the worst of the barbarism seen in the civil war. All this was done under the watchful eye of the Israelis. South Lebanon was now a brutal police state, with midnight arrests, curfews, and reprisal raids on civilians and a ban on any press coverage. In a tactic as old as colonial war, civilians were forced to lie as human shields on armoured personal carriers to deter any attack from the local resistance.

The brutality of the occupation had a profound effect on the Shia, and on the Lebanese people who increasingly saw Hezbollah as the only national resistance group. While both Syria and Iran did give significant support for different reasons it was the increasing support from all sections of Lebanese society that saw their

political stature grow. Syria did not hesitate to use them as a bargaining chip with Israel over the Golan Heights, while Iran saw Hezbollah as a possible tool in spreading their version of a Islamic revolution.

## Tactics

From the start of their resistance, Hezbollah fighters were distinguished not just by outstanding bravery but also by ingenious methods of attacking the Israeli Defence Forces. Far from the image of mad fundamentalists engaged in suicide attacks, the Hezbollah used the most sophisticated methods available. These they derived from a range of anti-colonial struggles, notably the Vietnam War, which Nasrallah often refers to.

Their attacks in South Lebanon were always on military targets and, unlike other groups, they never willingly aimed attacks on Israeli civilians. They are often accused of initiating the suicide bombings against Israelis. In fact out of 41 suicide attacks on the Israelis during this period, 27 were carried out by leftists groups, 3 by Christians, and 8 by Islamic fighters. All of Hezbollah's attacks targeted army personnel in occupied Lebanese territory.

Musawi had emphasised the fight against Israel and it became the top priority. Hezbollah members had been associated with the kidnappings of Westerners in Beirut. This now stopped as they became determined to shake off any attempt to label them as terrorists. They condemned the 9/11 attacks and have said that targeting non-military personnel is wrong.

But they have also supported and trained Hamas fighters and defend their attacks on Israeli civilians on the basis that Israeli society is militarised. They point out that the situation facing the Palestinians does not lend itself to the type of resistance that Hezbollah can mount. Shortly after 9/11, Nasrallah made it clear that Bush's War on Terror would not deter the resistance from fighting to liberate all areas of Lebanon from Israeli occupation, or stop them supporting the fight of the Palestinians.

Their use of Katyusha rockets has been condemned by Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and also Socialist Party TD Joe Higgins, as a flagrant breach of rules of war in deliberately targeting civilians. In actual fact these rockets are only fired as a direct response to Israeli attacks on civilian targets. Furthermore, the casualty figures from the recent conflict tell a different story: the overwhelming majority of deaths amongst Israelis were military, whereas the far greater number of Lebanese dead was overwhelmingly civilian. In many of the areas hit by Katyusha rockets, there was some military target nearby. According to the British journalist Jonathan Cook who is based in Israel, Hezbollah seemed to have made great efforts not to hit civilians, in stark contrast to the IDF who saw all Lebanese people as legitimate targets. As Cook rightly points out, their critics, on the left as well as the right, seem to want Hezbollah fighters to stand in an open field to be picked off by the superior weaponry of the IDF. No commentator has charged the Israeli military with shielding behind civilians when they located military centres in towns and cities.

During the war against the Israeli occupation Hezbollah astonished their enemy by routinely intercepting and jamming military communications, and by their use of their own TV network (Al Manar) to broadcast news of their attacks on the IDF.

## Wider Goals

While the fight against Israeli occupation has always been the main priority, the stated goals of Hezbollah have been wider. When Nasrallah addresses a mainly Shia audience the struggle is presented as a fight to liberate Jerusalem from the infidels and the ultimate goal espoused is an Islamic republic. However, when addressing a Lebanese audience he will dress up the struggle as a national liberation fight, which is the patriotic duty of all Lebanese to support, and at other times, to a wider Arab audience, he will talk of Hezbollah as the "spearhead of the Arab nation" thereby tapping into pan Arab ideas of nationalism.

The idea of Jihad for Nasrallah and other leading Hezbollah clerics is a flexible one. It is not about imposing Islamic rule on the whole of Lebanon. They have repeatedly stated that the overthrow of the Government was not a goal. Both Musawi and Fadlallah (the highest Shia Islamic jurists in Lebanon, often viewed as a Hezbollah member but more accurately a spiritual guide for them) have made it clear that they believed the mixed ethnic content of Lebanon made an Islamic republic impossible. Nasrallah famously said: "The Lebanese must freely choose their Government, we do not want to impose Islamic rule on anyone. We will not reign by force". In an open letter to the Lebanese people, they stated that Christians should not fear them and they repudiated other Islamic forces that sought to force Islamic law on different religions. They also made clear that the fight to recover Lebanese territory from Israel, support for the Palestinian struggle and opposition to the USA were guiding principles. They now publicly stated that they saw themselves first and foremost as a national resistance movement fighting alongside the Druze, Sunni, leftists and secular Lebanese.

## Broad Front

Hezbollah even formed a national brigade to recruit non-Shia fighters into the resistance. Their goal was to undercut the sectarianism of Lebanese society and foil any attempt by Israel to divide Lebanon with retaliatory attacks. Nasrallah again stated "there are two types of people...a brother in Islam or an equal in humanity".

Leading clerics in the movement engaged in meetings with the head of the Christian Maronite church to explain their position and members were encouraged to organise "get to know us" meetings with Lebanese of other faiths in towns and villages where the resistance was active. The success of these moves meant it proved impossible for the central government or Israel to cast Hezbollah as the cause of strife or to stoke up sectarian hatred against them.

While the war with Israel went on Hezbollah also built up their support by building an impressive network of social welfare supports for the poorest in the Shia community and throughout Lebanese soci-

ety. When Lebanon was formed under French influence, the Shia had very little influence on the traditional political system. The new central government ignored the needs of this poorest section of society. As Hezbollah grew they began to set up their own social network supports aided by funds from Iran. Initially focusing on supporting the families of dead resistance fighters, it spread to building clinics, hospitals and schools in areas that had never had such facilities. They even set up credit institutions to lend money to poor farmers and help with basic skills in farming and agriculture.

This meant that Hezbollah made astonishing gains in consecutive elections and further embedded themselves into the fabric of Lebanese society. They began to win support outside their own Shia base. The Lebanese electoral system is based on a complicated PR system where lists of candidates, usually headed by local well-known figures stand as a whole slate. Their pragmatic approach to elections even meant that on occasions they would stand on lists with forces on the right of Lebanese politics, even former Christian militias.

Many Lebanese saw the leadership of Hezbollah as being different to other political parties. They seemed to spurn wealth and were prepared to die for the struggle. Musawi was assassinated by the IDF and Nasrallah's son died in the resistance. When the Israelis offered to exchange his body for captured soldiers Nasrallah's reply was: "Let them bury him with his companions in Palestine". Nasrallah effectively sidelined the more hardline Islamic fraction around another leading cleric Subhi al-Tufaili who believed that any co-operation with non-Islamists was heretical. Nasrallah however always put the anti-imperialist fight first and went out of his way to reassure other sections of Lebanese society that they posed no threat to the secular status of Lebanon.

Since the last election, they have run two Government ministries. This will put them to the test as the Lebanese government is seeking neoliberal reforms and Hezbollah will come under pressure to conform on the social agenda. But they are still seen as being on the left on some issues. For example, as Minister of Labour one of Hezbollah's first acts was to remove a ban on the rights of Palestinians to work and to campaign for the rights of peasants.

More than anything, however, Hezbollah have come to represent the first tangible victory for any Arab force over the Zionist army. When Hezbollah forces liberated the infamous Khiam prison, the emotive images were broadcast live on Al Manar TV. Some of the prisoners, including women, had been held without charge and tortured for over 10 years. The images provoked spontaneous celebrations throughout Lebanon. Their recent resistance to the IDF onslaught and wholesale butchery of civilians has confirmed their iconic status throughout the Arab world.

## Victory

These victories represent a blow for Western imperialism on a par with the Vietnam War. It might be expected that the anti-war movement and the left in the west

would celebrate this fact alongside the millions of workers and poor of the Middle East. Instead the religious nature of Hezbollah has clouded people's judgement and prevented them from being seen as a national liberation movement, with all the contradictions and pressures that entails.

Inevitably contradictions between the different classes that make up Hezbollah will arise. In this process, the role of an independent socialist left will determine whether those supporting Hezbollah will link their fight into the broader struggle of workers across the Arab world. The strength of that left will depend on the ability to see the struggle against imperialism as part of the struggle for a socialist world. Only then can the argument for independent workers' action, for the need to take on the neoliberal agenda, for popular mobilisation, be made with any credibility or any chance of winning.

Condoleezza Rice may indeed be correct when she talked about the recent war witnessing the birth pangs of a new Middle East. In the past, struggles initially lead by religious figures or groups have sparked revolts that mobilised the power of the working class. Hezbollah's resistance may inspire a wider movement outside its Shia or Islamic origins.

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i [www.jcook.net](http://www.jcook.net)

ii Judith Palmer Harik: *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (I B Tauris, 2004)

# Socialists and national liberation



by Sean McGrath

Israel's assault on the people of Lebanon and the ongoing US led wars against Afghanistan and Iraq have reignited the debate about what attitude the left should take to national liberation struggles. One commentator, Fred Halliday, a past editor of the *New Left Review*, criticised socialists in the anti-war movement for supporting the Hezbollah led resistance to Israel, saying he found it 'disturbing' to see anti-war protesters in London carrying banners proclaiming: "We are all Hezbollah Now". (1)

Even Robert Fisk, a journalist with a fine record of telling the truth about events in the Middle East, said Hezbollah was to blame for the recent conflict. He accused Hezbollah of mounting a 'reckless attack on

Israel', 'breaking international law' and 'bringing unparalleled tragedy' to the Muslims of Lebanon. On July 26 Fisk wrote in the *London Independent*: "the Hezbollah have brought catastrophe to their coreligionists". (2)

Socialists see things differently – the responsibility for the death and destruction caused by the fighting in Lebanon rests firmly with Israel and its paymasters in Washington. Just like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the invasion of Lebanon must be seen as an attempt by the United States to dominate the region in the interests of oil and empire. And if the expulsion of Israel from Lebanon has set back imperialism, then it must be welcomed. After the fighting had stopped, Gideon Levy, an anti-war journalist with the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, speculated about what would

have happened if the Israeli Defence Forces had smashed Hezbollah. He said: "The US would have pushed us into a military clash with Syria and, drunk with victory, we might have been tempted. Iran might have been next." (3)

Socialists have profound disagreements with Hezbollah, but it should be remembered that it is not the first group to fight oppression under the banner of religion. Consider the statement by Colombian Catholic priest and National Liberation Army guerrilla, Father Camilo Torres, he said: "The Catholic who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin." He was killed while taking part in an ambush of Colombian troops in 1966. Should socialists turn their backs on such people because of their views on abortion, contraception and homosexuality? To do so

would not only dismiss the importance of anti-imperialist resistance but also close off the possibility of challenging, with any credibility, these conservative views and winning their many supporters to socialist politics.

Socialists were right to defend the resistance in Lebanon. Those who write off Hezbollah as 'Islamofascist' are insulting the majority of people in the Middle East. One British newspaper reported what many Arab Christians in Syria were saying about the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, at the height of the conflict: "Israel's offensive against Lebanon has brought Christians in neighbouring Syria closer to Nasrallah, a Shi'ite Muslim, reviving Arab nationalist feelings and blurring sectarian divisions. Bishops and priests say Syria's Christians, a devout community of around three million, identify strongly with Nasrallah's battle with Israel, which has occupied Syria's Golan Heights since 1967."

The report went on to say that in the Syrian capital a priest at a special mass at the Lady of Damascus Catholic Church told his congregation: "Pray for the resistance, pray for Hassan Nasrallah." In the article, Thanet Salem, a Syrian commentator, described the Hezbollah leader: "Nasrallah extols the Muslim nation, but he is also seen as a symbol of a national liberation movement. No wonder Christians feel such affinity to him."(4)

The current level of support enjoyed by Islamist groups like Hezbollah, even amongst Arab Christians, is explained not just by the viciousness of Israeli repression but also by the political bankruptcy of secular Arab nationalism. In Palestine, the dual strategy of the PLO – armed struggle plus international diplomacy – failed to bring either peace or freedom to Palestinians. Instead of trying to mobilise the huge support that Palestinians have amongst ordinary people in the Arab world, the PLO looked instead to the Arab regimes such as Jordan and Syria for support. The Arab regimes showed their true colours when in 1970 King Hussein of Jordan, wary of a rebellion amongst the many Palestinians who lived under his rule, attacked the PLO. The resulting bloodbath became known as Black September. Despite the occasional verbal blast in the direction of the United States to win domestic support, and attempts to carve out more regional influence for themselves, the Arab states are integrated into the international capitalist system and will do nothing to threaten it.

The other elements of the PLO's strategy have also been seen to fail; its military failure was highlighted when it was driven out of Lebanon by Israel in 1980. The high point of the PLO's diplomatic effort was the Oslo accords signed in 1993 which brought

about the current Palestinian Authority. It was established on just a fraction of the historic land of Palestine, it exercises little power and is under a constant economic and military siege by Israel. And the more the PLO capitulated to imperialism the more its leading members turned to personal corruption.

This process is not unique to the PLO or Arab nationalism, it has been seen with Irish republicanism and other nationalist struggles. The pattern is familiar: first comes a selfless period of struggle against the oppressive power, a military impasse then sets in, negotiations take place, followed by compromise and then integration into the capitalist structures of power. So Yasser Arafat ended a life of struggle against Israel by giving it recognition and agreeing to police parts of the West Bank and Gaza for the Israeli authorities. In



Northern Ireland, Gerry Adams and his power-sharing colleagues unleashed a neoliberal assault on the public sector by setting up the Review of Public Administration; he then pleaded with Ian Paisley to take the top post in a republican/loyalist coalition at Stormont. What the various nationalist movements have in common is that none of them seek to overthrow the capitalist system. Armed or unarmed they are still reformists. They treat their supporters as passive victims, mere spectators in their own 'liberation'. They all set out to rule a capitalist state so there is a certain logic about them taking their place in one – even if it is not the state they originally fought for.

Marxists, however, have always argued that it is a mistake to take a neutral position when these movements clash with the system. For much of the nineteenth century the founders of the revolutionary socialist tradition, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, engaged in a debate inside the workers movement about what attitude socialists should take to these movements. A lot of the argument centred on Poland which was dominated by Tsarist Russia, and the Austrian Empire. For Marx the main enemy at the time was Russia. It was the Tsarist regime that held back the development of democracy in Europe – by organ-

ising coups and putting down revolts. Russia was known as the 'gendarme of Europe' in much the same way as the United States today is referred to as the 'world's policeman'.

Marx argued that a victory for the Polish independence movement would be a major blow against Russia and the big powers and would open the way for the advance of democratic struggles throughout Europe – the cause of Poland was therefore a working class issue. In a speech in 1875, Marx said: "The partition of Poland is the cement which holds together the three great military despots: Russia, Prussia and Austria. Only the rebirth of Poland can tear these bonds apart and thereby remove the greatest obstacle in the way to social emancipation of the European peoples."

Marx took the view that "a people which subjugates another people forges its own chains". So when it came to British rule in Ireland he argued that the Fenian movement of the 1860s should be defended because of the way the British ruling class used Ireland to dominate the British workers. He described the way in which the working class in every industrial centre in England was divided into English and Irish workers who were forced to compete against each other for jobs and wages and hated each other as a consequence. Marx wrote: "This antagonism is artificially kept alive

and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this." In order to break the hold of the ruling class and English chauvinism Marx argued that it was necessary for the workers' movement in England to 'side openly with Ireland' as the first condition of its own emancipation.

Marx was not adopting a nationalist position; rather he was assessing national struggles by the political consequences which would flow from their victory. He was looking at the national movements from the point of view of how they served or harmed the interests of the international working class. Hence in the 1848 revolutions he did not support the rebellions of the Croats, Serbs and Slovaks – these movements looked to Russia for support and their victory could only lead to an expansion of Russian despotism. Socialists take a similar position today towards some movements that claim to be fighting oppression. For instance Zionists claim that Israel should be supported because at root it is about the right of Jews to exercise self determination and escape from oppres-

sion. However, the setting up of Israel in 1948 was itself an act of national dispossession. Israel was created when Zionist terror gangs ethnically cleansed the native Palestinians, expelling over 750,000 people from their homes and destroying 531 villages. Secondly, Zionism should be opposed because it has always been linked to, and is sustained by, imperialism – first by Britain then by the United States. “We can be the vanguard of culture against barbarianism,” said the founder of modern Zionism Theodor Herzl. Zionism therefore has no valid claim to be a movement against oppression.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Russian revolutionary Lenin carried on Marx’s approach to national struggles when he argued that nations had the right to self-determination as part of the fight against the new imperialism that emerged in the run up to the First World War. But he also added something new. Previously, debates about the national question were limited to the countries of Europe, but Lenin insisted that the oppressed across the entire world had a role to play in the struggle against imperialism. Capitalism, Lenin said, was a world system that dominated people across the globe and those people were not just victims but also part of the world class struggle. Colonial struggles might be dominated by nationalist or religious ideas but nevertheless, he said, they could play a crucial role in weakening the imperial powers and bringing millions into battle. Therefore at a Congress of the Peoples of the East in September 1920, Russian Bolshevik leaders called for a ‘holy war’ against Western imperialism. In the Asian parts of the old Russian Empire the Bolsheviks recruited many thousands of Muslims, made alliances with pan-Islamic groups and the Red Army fought alongside Islamic guerrilla bands against the White forces. In Chechnya the Bolsheviks won over a leading Islamic fighter who led the Chechen Revolutionary Committee.

Lenin believed that under the impact of capitalist crisis the ruling class would be faced with revolts on many fronts, these revolts would form part of the revolutionary process that would help bring workers to power. While discussing the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin Lenin said: “To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without the revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices...is to repudiate social revolution. So one army lines up in one place and says, ‘We are for socialism,’ and another somewhere else says ‘We are for imperialism.’ And that will

be the social revolution! Whoever expects a pure social revolution will never live to see it.”

Leon Trotsky further enriched the Marxist understanding of national liberation with his theory of Permanent

revolution,” said Trotsky. It would be permanent also in the sense that in order to survive it would have to spread to other more advanced countries, so the struggle is an international one.

Trotsky’s theory is just as relevant today and is applicable to the Middle East where there is national oppression, a large rural population as well as huge concentrations of workers in the oil sector and other industries. The theory of Permanent Revolution is central to breaking the cycle of repression and wars in the region, because although Hezbollah might have been able to force an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, it requires a profoundly more powerful force to end Israeli and US oppression. Such a transformation would require the linking of the national struggles of the Palestinians and other oppressed groups with the one force in the area that has the power to smash the Israeli state - the Arab working class. When the movement for Palestinian rights fuses with the day to day struggles of Arab workers against their Arab rulers this will mark out a roadmap for the end of Israel and the creation of a secular, socialist Middle East.



1 Opendemocracy.net  
September 8 2006 – The Left  
and the Jihad – By Fred

Revolution which identified the working class as the force that would end national oppression. Writing against the background of the 1905 revolution in Russia Trotsky said that modern capitalism was characterised by what he called ‘uneven but combined development’. This basically meant that backward countries like Russia had semi-feudal conditions in the countryside but also the conditions of modern capitalism, such as a powerful working class, in the big cities. In these conditions the bourgeoisie, who had arrived late on the scene, was too timid to fight for democratic change – it was too fearful of rousing the working class to their feet. And the peasantry, dispersed and obsessed with their individual bits of land, would not chart an independent political path – they would follow the politics that dominated the towns.

In this situation, Trotsky said the working class would play the decisive role in achieving democratic change. However, once it achieved political power it would not stop at democratic demands. The revolution would become permanent in the sense that it would move on to pushing through the economic and political programme of the working class. “The democratic revolution grows over immediately into the socialist, and thereby becomes a

Halliday

2. See Counterpunch.org September 5, 2006 for a critique of Fisk’s reporting of Hezbollah. Will Robert Fisk tell us the whole story? Time For a Champion of Truth to Speak Up. Jonathon Cook

3 Quoted in Socialist Worker (UK) August 19 2006. US empire is rocked by Israel’s defeat by Joseph Choonara

4 Syria’s Christians rally behind Hezbollah. By Khaled Yacoub Oweis August 4 2006, The Scotsman

### Suggested further reading

“National Liberation” by Chris Harman in Anti Imperialism - a guide for the movement, Bookmarks

Marxism and the National Question by Callinicos, SWP educational pamphlet

“Deflected Permanent Revolution”, by Tony Cliff, SWP pamphlet

All available from Bookmarks, Dublin

“Powerless in Gaza: the Palestinian Authority and the myth of the peace process” by Anne Alexander in International Socialism Winter 2000 available at <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj89/alexander.htm>

Bolsheviks and Islam by Dave Crouch in Socialist Review December 2003 available at <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr280/crouch.htm>

# Where did neoliberalism come from? Manufacturing consent? News and the mass media.



**By Peadar O'Grady**

The lies about WMDs and a 9/11 connection, as justifications for the Iraq war, have led to a widespread skepticism about official sources and raises the question, once again, about the role of the media in reporting 'the news'. The rapid changes in digital and cable technology like the Internet can also mean a more rapid access to a wider variety of sources of print, audio and video information. What does this mean and how should the left respond to this changing world of the media?

An understandable response would be to point to the overwhelming power of the mass media and its control by huge corporations, the state and the ruling class. This power enables them to put out propaganda to support capitalism and censor dissent to 'brainwash' the public. From another point of view, the Internet is the supreme democratic tool. While these views can promote resistance they can also lead to feelings of powerlessness. Thankfully the reality is at once more complex and contradictory.

The victory of the Hezbollah resistance

prompted a marked change in the reporting on Israel. While up to the middle of the war in Lebanon in 2006, Hezbollah were the terrorists and Israel merely defending their right to exist, this changed dramatically to include some mainstream reporting of Hezbollah as a national resistance and Israel as war criminals. This cannot be explained simply by reference to the exposure of Israeli atrocities like the bombing of Qana. Qana was the site of an even more shocking slaughter of civilians by Israeli warplanes in 1996. It was clear that this time the divisions on the 'War on Terror' within the ruling class worldwide and particularly within the US itself combined with the obvious mass support for Hizbollah in Lebanon and the international antiwar

movement played key roles in this change.

In this article I would like to explore the role of the media in relation to its owners, its workers and its audience and to look at how the media can both reflect dominant ideology and challenge it. Our understanding of and approach to the media can have important implications

for how we approach the question of fighting for a better world.

## **The Media Owners**

The term mass media is, in terms of history, a relatively recent phenomenon. Newspapers with mass readership appeared from the early 1800s and radio and TV broadcasting from the early 1900s. The first daily newspapers in Britain, with a mass circulation of over 2 million, were radical papers like the Northern Star, the paper of the Chartist movement. The realisation by capitalists that profits could be made led to the introduction of market forces and advertising, squeezing out the radical press, particularly after the demise of the Chartist pro-democracy movement.

In modern Europe the print media is almost entirely owned by capitalist corporations like Rupert Murdoch's News International or Tony O'Reilly's Independent News and Media (IN&M). IN&M owned newspapers account for about 80% of all newspapers sold in Ireland including the Evening Herald, Irish Independent, Sunday Independent, Sunday World and the freesheet 'herald am' as well as 11 regional newspapers. Worldwide, IN&M publishes over 176 newspaper and magazine titles with a circulation of over 100 million copies from the UK, Australia, New Zealand and India to South Africa and operates over 70 on-line editorial and classified sites. It manages gross assets of 4 billion, a turnover of over 1.8 billion and employs over 11,000 people. It is also involved in advertising in a joint venture with the shady corporation, Clear Channel Independent.

O'Reilly is also typical of media moguls in that he has interests elsewhere like Waterford Wedgewood, Chorus, Eircom and Fitzwilton (the company which gave Ray Burke 30,000 in 'donations'). O'Reilly is a billionaire, a former chairman of the Heinz corporation, is married to a Greek shipping Heiress, Chrissy Goulandris and pays no taxes in Ireland by claiming to live in the Bahamas.

Radio and TV have traditionally involved more investment and control by the state, like in the BBC or RTE, because of the massive investment in infrastructure involved. Where market forces have become involved like in the US or Italy the same tendency in the print media towards concentration and monopolies has been in evidence. Times-Warner is now the largest media corporation in the world employing 340,000 media workers and Berlusconi's Fininvest dominates Italy's TV industry.

Such state and capitalist control and their wider business interests certainly lead to a bias toward supporting George Bush or privatisation and opposing Hugo Chavez or corporation taxes, public services and trade unions. Sexism and racism also serve ruling class interests by scapegoating women with responsibility for standards of care and blaming ethnic groups or immigrants for shortages in everything from jobs to healthcare and housing. Overall, prejudice in the media helps to divert blame from the ruling class and divide the working class.

But in global capitalism, the western bourgeois media are more marked by a limited diversity than a crushing uniformity. There is naked propaganda – supporting the war on terror or islamophobia or political censorship like Section 31 that was imposed for decades in Ireland. However, when the ruling class are split, particularly in a crisis, on how best to move forward, the media reflect their divergent views.

The power of the media to bias content is further limited by the importance of maintaining profits through sales and advertising revenue. Crude propaganda and censorship don't necessarily 'sell'. Capitalist-owned or state-controlled media like RTE also need to maintain credibility by reflecting some degree of diversity, including dissent and at least some truth about actual living conditions. In a modern

bourgeois democracy this demands reflecting a more diverse range of news and views than in a simple propaganda/censorship model – but always within the framework of accepting capitalism and the 'national interest'.

## **The Media Workers**

Accepting the desire of the ruling class, through its state or business media owners, to limit diversity in the media still does not explain how such bias works in practice. In reality there are many ways in which media control works. The huge costs of setting up a newspaper or producing a film mean the wealthy have an insurmountable advantage over ordinary individuals. Advertising revenue can also be withdrawn from more radical enterprises or to prevent their work being shown or published.

While millions work in the media industries, only a small proportion of media workers have any say in the content of articles or programming known as editorial control. In the media hierarchy, those elite journalists or managers that do have a say are highly paid (like Pat Kenny or Joe Duffy) and tend to share ruling class interests and concerns. They tend to come from wealthy backgrounds or to mix and socialise with the ruling class of business executives and senior civil servants and in any case to fear putting their career and status at risk if they do not toe the line. This is how these managers and senior journalists come to understand the 'commonsense' of capitalist interests.

Pressure from business or government sources is thus informally relayed and is known as 'flak'. Editors often express this at editorial meetings by saying things like 'we are being watched on this one'. While an editor can censor or edit a piece, they exert much of their control on content by setting the agenda or the limits to what are topical subjects and for sources for information or comment. While there are many examples of campaigning journalists like Robert Fisk, Greg Palast, Paul Foot or Eamonn McCann, these are more the exception than the rule.

Most journalists however are poorly paid wage workers, at best paid similar to teachers or other ordinary white-collar

workers and have little control over what sources or material they have to work on. They are forced to rely on 'official' sources like government departments, university academics, think tanks and press releases from political and business organisations, due to pressure of time and editorial guidance on 'acceptable' sources. War correspondents who 'embed' themselves with the US army show the most extreme form of this behaviour. No mainstream journalist would be allowed to embed with the Iraqi insurgents or Hezbollah for example.

Corporations, business organisations and governments have large budgets devoted to flooding the media with facts and opinions favourable to business and the ruling class. This has become known as 'Public Relations' or 'PR' or more recently as 'spin'. In politics the obsession with parliament also means that activities or ideas outside of the parliamentary system tend to be ignored.

Finally even the structure of the media presentation limits diversity. Connected issues are presented separately, a strike for pay on one page, reporting corporate profits on another. The time allocated to dissenting views is rarely given enough time to explain while familiar establishment views are repeated until they can be given as a soundbite.

In times of social struggle, during strikes or revolutions, these controls can be resisted and even overturned. During the miners strike in Britain in 1984-85 print workers insisted on a right of reply by the miners union when their paper ran a story which lied about the miners. On one occasion the front page of the Sun was left blank because workers refused to print a picture demonising miner's leader Arthur Scargill by showing him with his hand raised like a fascist salute.

During the 'Carnation Revolution' in Portugal in 1974, which overthrew the fascist regime of Marcelo Caetano, newspapers as well as TV and radio stations were taken over by media workers. Workers at the A Capital newspaper announced that: 'Information cannot be left in the hands of journalists alone. ALL workers must participate'. The Republica newspapers' first coordinating committee of 12 workers was elected by all 174 workers at the paper and consisted of 4 print workers, 3 office workers, 2 dispatch workers, 1 proofreader, 1 driver and 1 press operator. They had full editorial control. They explained: 'We declare to all Portuguese workers that we are fighting for control over the press by the working class. We declare that the working class should interfere in decisions related to the production of social communications and their distribution'.

Similarly, in the French revolts of May 1968 the Film Technicians Union set up the Estates General of Cinema, an organisation whose aims were: '...the destruction of the monopolies and the creation of a nationalised industry; workers' control and a method of production not governed by the law of profit; the abolition of censorship; and the linking of cinema and television independent of the political and financial powers'.

During these revolts the circulation of radical newspapers produced by revolu-

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**In Italy in 1994 the government of right wing media billionaire, Silvio Berlusconi, was brought down by a general strike and massive demonstrations. Trade unionists carried a lapel badge which said: 'Look Berlusconi, We are your audience'.**

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tionary workers and trade unionists also increased dramatically. Throughout history this pattern is also repeated: The Chartists' Northern Star, the Bolsheviks' papers Iskra or Pravda (before it became the mouthpiece of Stalin) or Connolly's The Worker. These papers both reflect and help to organise the revolutionary activity of the workers.

During periods of lower levels of class struggle the strength of union organisation within the media can give more control over pay and conditions for media workers, including editorial control. As one journalist put it bluntly: 'I can't tell the editor to fuck off if I haven't got a union behind me'.

In Italy in 1994 the government of right wing media billionaire, Silvio Berlusconi, was brought down by a general strike and massive demonstrations. To press home the point that the propaganda power of the media was clearly not all powerful almost all trade union-

ists carried a lapel badge which said: 'Look Berlusconi, We are your audience'.

### The Media Audience?

The audience for the mass media is of course a mass audience. Some types of media, especially newspapers or specialist radio and TV channels, tend to target different social classes. This is driven by competition and by the needs of advertisers to target certain groups. Ads for expensive cars are more likely to be found in the Financial Times than in the Evening Herald for example. These media tend to reflect the political and social views of their target audience. The Sunday Independent is more likely to push right wing views than the Sunday Tribune. For major broadcasters like RTE where there is a monopoly, like for newspapers in US cities, the range of material and views tend to be broader but still within a capitalist and nationalist framework.

The targeting and limited diversity of the media tends to lead to two divergent views of what influence the media has on its audience. One view is that people are at the mercy of the media and are easily swayed by what is thrown at them. The other is that we don't believe what we read in the papers or see on TV. As Robbie Coltrane put it: 'Just because 18 million people have their sets turned on it doesn't mean they are watching'.

There is a degree of truth to both views but neither takes into account that we do not just engage with the media as isolated individuals but as people with personal experience of the real world and as members of social groups like class, gender, family, workplace, unions or political associations. This means that the media are not our only source of information and under-

standing. In general media surveys tend to show that those most easily swayed by the mass media are those most dependent on it as a source and those with least involvement in social activity, organisation or struggle.

This can help to explain why for example, during the years of 'the troubles' in the North, many Catholics in the South tended

many miners held sexist, homophobic or even racist ideas but because of the solidarity they received from other groups of workers and their families they took down page three posters of naked women, socialised with immigrant workers raising funds for them and sent a banner to lead the Gay Pride march. The solidarity of struggle forced many of them to confront and reject some of their own prejudices.

The Internet and cable technologies may give more rapid and convenient access to the internationally available media but they do not guarantee the freedom of that access or the level of control by often the same media corporations involved in print and broadcasting. It is not just that only a minority can currently access the Internet on a worldwide scale but that access to information does not mean any more power to make decisions about our lives including even the privatisation of the internet itself through cable charges or control of servers.

Socialists certainly should fight for increasing the democratic participation in and control over

broadcasting and print media in all its forms but this requires control over the massive infrastructure of the media, not just the Internet. Socialist papers, journals and broadcasting also have a key role to play in ensuring that socialist arguments and the experiences of workers' struggles are more widely available and countering right wing prejudices and ideas.

In all critical moments in history when mass movements start to take control of their world the democratic control of the mass media is always crucial. This will mean the most widespread involvement in making and breaking news. But just as the involvement of health workers and bus workers will be vital for proper health and transport so too will be the involvement of media workers in democratising the media. Socialists have a vital role to play in fighting for this unity of action and ideas or 'theory and practice' by promoting the best ideas for fighting while active in the movements.

As Karl Marx put it: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

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to believe that the IRA was the cause of the violence while almost no Catholic in the North believed this, whether or not they supported the strategy of the armed struggle. The majority social group in Ireland is of course the class dependent on wages for their income, wage workers or the working class. The reports of the wonders of the Tiger economy will tend to fall on deaf ears in community groups fighting the bin tax or the cost of housing or trade unionists campaigning against low pay. For workers, Nationalist rhetoric of 'We are all in it together' is often countered by 'There is one law for the rich and another for the poor'.

Where workers see themselves as atomised individuals competing for houses and jobs they are vulnerable to ruling class ideas of the national interest and scapegoating. Where workers on the other hand see themselves as part of a class united by common interests they are more likely to agree with socialist ideas of solidarity and fighting the boss. This difference depends crucially on whether workers have experience of collective action in the real world. Individual workers or groups of workers can hold progressive views like solidarity and, on the contrary, reactionary views like sexism or racism, at the same point in time. Italian socialist, Antonio Gramsci, called this the 'contradictory consciousness' of the working class.

Class is certainly the key division in society and workers have the power in collective action to change the world. Capitalism forces workers to fight back on issues like pay and conditions or bin taxes but, crucially, when they do they can dramatically change their views of society as a whole. During the British miners strike

# Raunch culture and the marketisation of sex

By Goretti Horgan

The fight for sexual liberation in Ireland was long and hard. The extent of the changes can be seen by comparing attitudes over the last 30 years. A national survey in 1973-74 found that three out of four people thought sex outside marriage was always wrong. But by 1997, 21-24 year olds had had, on average, 13 sexual partners. The 1997 survey also found that, of 17-20 year olds, exactly half had had sex before they were sixteen. A recent survey in Donegal found that young people in that previously conservative county are fast catching up with Dublin and the rest.

Now that we have moved from the Magdalen Laundries to a more open attitude to sex, have we got sexual liberation or have we been conned? As lap dancing clubs open up all over the country and community centres offer classes in pole dancing, many women's rights activists are saying: "this is not what we fought for". They are right. The image of women's sexuality being promoted in neo-liberal Ireland is far from liberating.

As Ariel Levy, author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and The Rise of Raunch Culture* argues: "Why is labouring to look like Pamela Anderson empowering? How is imitating a stripper or a porn star – a woman whose job is to imitate arousal in the first place – going to render us sexually liberated?"

We may have challenged the "virgin or whore" double standard that kept Ireland sexually repressed for so long; but on the streets of any Irish town on a Saturday night, it does sometimes seem that young women are today encouraged to have a view of their sexuality sold to them by advertisers, rather than something they explore and develop for themselves. As Levy says "Raunch culture isn't about opening our minds to the possibilities and mysteries of sexuality. It's about endlessly reiterating one particular – and particularly commercial – shorthand for sexiness."

Levy is clear that the problem is a society that sees "money as the only measure of something's worth ... You see this attitude everywhere, so why wouldn't you see it in relation to sexuality and the role of women?"

The Celtic Tiger has seen a massive expansion in the sex industry. There has been an explosion in prostitution, including the trafficking of women, some of whom are effectively slaves. A newspaper recently reported that brothels in Dublin generally experience a lunchtime 'rush hour', mostly by married men.

One young woman rescued from forced



Near nudity, nearly normalised ... raunchy Pamela Anderson plays an unlikely bookseller in *Stacked*.

prostitution told RTE's Prime Time how she cried and told some of the men who'd bought her: 'I don't want to do this, I am too young', but they ignored her. It is hard to understand how any man, particularly one who is married and maybe has daughters himself, could ignore the girl's plight. Yet they did.

None of the conventional media explanations for such behaviour explain it. A minority, mainly right wingers, complains that it's down to the liberalisation of sexual attitudes. Despite a woeful lack of sex education in schools, North and South, they blame 'too much' sex education. The majority, who welcome more open attitudes to sex, are more likely to see the rise of the sex industry as a price that, unfortunately, has to be paid.

Many feminists and anti-oppression theorists argue that it is male power that is responsible for the sexism and commodification of women's bodies that leads to rape, and to pornography, prostitution and the sex industry generally.

A different perspective emerges in Susan Faludi's book *Stiffed* on the 'crisis of masculinity'. In it, Faludi explains she started her research assuming this 'crisis' was caused by something men were doing and all she needed to do was figure out how to stop them doing it. After months of sitting in on a therapeutic group for men who had been violent to their partners, Faludi found: "There was something almost absurd about these men struggling, week after week, to recognise themselves as dominators when they were so clearly dominated, done in by the world ... The men had probably felt in control when they beat their wives, but their everyday experience was of being controlled – a feeling they had no way of expressing because to reveal it was less than masculine, would make each of them, in fact, 'no man at all'."

Faludi doesn't excuse these men's violent behaviour, but she does argue that it is an understanding of the lack of power and control that working-class people experience over all aspects of their lives that is the best way to make sense of how they behave. That understanding is at the heart of the Marxist theory of alienation.

Marx argued that a tiny group in society – the ruling class – directly and indirectly wield enormous power over the lives of millions. But the experience of the vast majority of people – the working class – is of powerlessness, of having little or no control over the major areas of their own lives. And it is this lack of power that can lead people to violent and anti-social behaviour and to the despair and frustration behind drug and alcohol abuse, depression and miserable family lives.

Marx saw four aspects of alienation, involving the worker's relations to the products of her work; her productive activity; her essential humanity (which Marx called her "species being"); and her fellow human beings. Alienation is an important concept, explaining some of the worst aspects of women's oppression.

The separation of producers from the means of production distinguishes capitalism from all previous modes of production. Under capitalism, the worker has no control over what is produced – the product of her labour – which belongs to the employer. In previous societies, people have used their creative abilities to produce goods, some of which they would consume themselves, some they would exchange or sell. Under capitalism, many are unable to purchase what we have produced, be it a computer, a car or designer clothes. Similarly, workers in the services sector – say, in retail – are unable to afford the expensive goods they sell.

Most workers work to get the money to allow them do what they enjoy. Marx saw work not in this narrow sense of paid labour but rather as the creative, conscious activity that distinguishes human beings from other animals. But the lack of control we have over our work under capitalism, means work is not something that most people expect to enjoy: "...the worker feels himself only when he is not working; when he is working he does not feel himself. He is at home when he is not working, and not at home when he is working ... [work's] alien character is clearly demonstrated by the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists it is shunned like the plague".

When Marx wrote about alienation from our humanity, or our 'species being'

as he calls it, he did not mean a fixed, unchanging human nature of the kind right-wingers love to push – such as human beings are ‘naturally selfish’, or men are ‘naturally warlike’. Marx was clear that ‘human nature’ is “the ensemble of social relations” – and since social relations are constantly changing, so too are the characteristics of human beings. Rather, for Marx, species-being meant those characteristics of humans that distinguish them from other animals. Foremost amongst these is precisely the ability to perform conscious labour. Marx argued that, while animals also produce, they produce only for their immediate needs, “...while man produces even when he is

free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need”.

This innate human creativity which is stifled under capitalism is best understood in terms of any ordinary job. When is the job most enjoyable? It’s when you have some measure of control over it, when you can use your own initiative, when you feel you’re doing some good, contributing something to society. But the nature of work under capitalism means that there is a continual process of denying workers control.

In contrast, a socialist society would promote the rounded development of all through the exercise of their skills and talents. Again and again Marx returned to the idea that ‘the free development of each will be the condition for the free development of all’. A socialist society would remove all possible barriers to people reaching their full potential and exploring every aspect of their being: “In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive realm of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society ...makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. “

Add to this the competition which drives capitalism and encourages us from the earliest age (for example, through the exam system) not to feel human solidarity, and we see the fourth aspect of Marx’s theory of alienation – alienation from our fellow human beings. Capitalism sets us in competition with each other for jobs, houses, hospital beds, good schools etc. It leads one set of workers to see another as a threat. In the face of such pressures, what

is surprising is not that people sometimes act in selfish or anti-social ways but rather that people continue to show such caring and unselfish behaviour.

What links Marx’s theory of alienation in relation to the work process with alien-



Ariel Levy, Author of the book *Femal Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*



ation throughout society as a whole is his related theory of commodity fetishism. And this brings us back to what Ariel Levy has to say about female sexuality in developed countries today, where money is “the only measure of something’s worth”. Things are produced not because they are useful, but to make a profit. Everything, the ability to work, care for the elderly, even sex, is turned into a commodity. Comedian Caroline Ahern’s question “what first attracted you to millionaire Paul Daniels?” echoed Marx on the way money dominates everything under capitalism: “I am ugly but

I can buy the most beautiful woman. Which means to say that I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness, its repelling power, is destroyed by money”.

When we take into account that alienation is at its worst where there are the highest levels of inequality, we start to understand the rapid growth in the sex industry in Ireland. As the Celtic Tiger roared, it brought welcome jobs, but those jobs have taken over some people’s lives. For men who spend four hours a day commuting to and from some soulless job, under pressure to do their job better and faster than the next guy, with no time to relax and to ‘be himself’, a lunchtime visit to a brothel might seem like a way of grabbing a bit of control over his life. What this means for his relationship with his partner, or with

women generally, probably does not occur to him.

And if the woman whose body he buys for half an hour cries and says she doesn’t want to do this, that she is too young, well, he has paid for a commodity, why should he not have it? The human solidarity that we would hope for may have been killed that morning by a rampaging boss or some problem that put paid to thoughts of a weekend off. Alienation from his own essential humanity and his fellow human beings is seen at its worst. This is not to excuse the men who behave in this way. But, like the men in Faludi’s book, it does recognise that the men who use the sex industry are also victims of the system that breeds prostitution and that commodifies every aspect of our lives, even something as core as our sexuality.

As well as providing an explanation for the degradations of the sex industry, Marxism also provides a way of ending it. Capitalism brought not only alienation, but also its own gravedigger in the working class, the six billion of us globally who have to work to make a living. In the working class lies the people power that can bring about a better world – where people are put before profit, where women and men have control over the work they do and over all the decisions that affect their lives.

In such a world, women – and men – could at last explore and develop their sexuality without distortion by the market; no woman could be trafficked, none would have to consider selling her body and no man would dream of seeing sex as something other than a means of mutual enjoyment.

# Shell's ugly record

Shell's use of violence against protesters in Bellanaboy in Mayo is nothing new. Here PHILIP IKURUSI, a Niger Delta activist, recounts the brutal regime that the company imposed in that country.

By Philip Ikurusi

With the abolition of slavery, there was a radical change to the palm oil trade in the early decades of the 19th century. Like the slave trade before it, the trade in palm oil held nothing for the peoples of the Niger Delta. The European traders cheated them with naked impunity, the most notorious being Sir George Taubman Goldie, who was helmsman at the Royal Niger Company.

Crude oil has since displaced palm oil as the principal resource for trade in the global market but, as the Henry Willink Commission report of 1958 put it, the Niger Delta remains "poor, backward and neglected" despite its status as the richest part of Nigeria in terms of natural resource endowment. The Niger Delta holds large oil and gas deposits in the area as well as extensive forests, fertile agricultural land and enormous fish resources. Yet, as we speak, the Niger Delta's potential for sustainable development remains unfulfilled. Today, the area is increasingly threatened by environmental degradation and worsening economic conditions.

It is now known that over 10% of the Niger Delta's mangrove forest has been lost to deforestation triggered by the exploration and production activities of big time oil companies such as Shell, ChevronTexaco, TotalfinaElf and Agip, among others. The oil companies as well as other agencies have greatly contributed to agricultural land encroachment and environmental degradation by constructing outlets in the fresh water swamp forests to reach their mining points. These poorly conceived roads block streams, flood plains and create stagnant pools of water, thereby killing hitherto healthy and thriving forests.

Since Shell struck the first oil well in Oloibiri in the eastern Niger Delta in 1956, the oil-producing communities have known only poverty, misery and sorrow. Oil spillage which pollutes farmlands, fishing streams and ponds, and the indiscriminate flaring of gas, which poisons the air we breathe, is the brutal fact of our daily lives. Oloibiri now falls in the Ogbia Local Government area of Bayelsa State. The only evidence that Oloibiri was once celebrated is the idle Christmas tree, which stands where the first oil well fed the greedy pipes of the oil companies, and the repressive Nigerian government's bank accounts.



Today, Oloibiri is a monument of SHAME. It is a classic case of neglect and insensitivity perpetrated by the repressive and corrupt government of Nigeria and Shell. It is a matter of great regret that the peoples of the Niger Delta do not receive their fair share of the oil proceeds obtained from their land, the bulk of which is appropriated by the central government and the big oil companies. Oil is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, accounting for 97% of the country's export earnings and over 80% of public revenue. Little wonder that the oil has since become the target of state power and the reason why the federal government and Trans-national companies exercise their ruthless might whenever there is a perceived threat to the industry.

## Diary of killings by the Nigerian Government and the Oil Companies in Ijaw Land

**May 27, 1999**, unknown persons burned down Sahara-Ama. This town is a host to Chevron's oil operational center. Likewise, Tsekelewu and Opuama had their lands and forests destroyed by Chevron (Ijaw Council for Human Rights, March 24, 2003).

**May 28**, following a protest in which about 120 Ijaw youths occupied Chevron's construction barge at the Parabe's production platform, in the company of Chevron's security chief, the security force, transported by the company's helicopters, shot at the youths, killing two and wounding many.

**July 27, 1999**, soldiers on patrol arrested Ten Ijaw persons along the Benin River. The whereabouts of those ten are still unknown.

**August 14, 1999**, soldiers at the Ogbel-Ijaw waterfront killed an Ijaw youth.

Between September 9 and 13, 1999, a combined team of soldiers and Mobile Policemen killed about 50 Ijaw people, including men and women at Yenagoa.

**September 20, 1999**, a team of Nigerian Mobile Policemen and an expatriate staff member of Shell, working for Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas, shot protesting Ijaws in Bonny. Several people were wounded.

**October 1999**, Nigerian soldiers at the Soku Gas Plant in Oluashiri/Soku in Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State killed an Ijaw fisherman, Atonye Minabo.

**November 6, 1999**, Sunday Nigerian soldiers at NPA in Warri, Delta State, killed Konyeta, a councillor.

**November 13, 1999**, Nigerian soldiers killed three Ijaws at Obama and Akamabou.

**November 19, 1999**, nine Ijaws were killed at the NPA wharf in Port Harcourt.

**November 20, 1999**, Nigerian soldiers, under code name 'Hakuri 11', mounted an attack against Odi Town, supposedly to arrest some miscreants. The entire town was burnt down and over 300 people were killed.

Wilson Oyibo of Okerenkoko was killed in a Shell surveillance activity carried out by Shell hired hands.

**May 2000**, soldiers guarding Agip oil facilities in Brass killed three Ijaw youths. During the same month, seventeen (17) others were killed in Etiama.

September 2000, eight Ijaws were killed in Olugbobiri.

**December 11, 2002**, Nigerian soldiers at the Upoko/Opumani oil field killed Mr. Lofe Umagba.

**January 23, 2002**, Nigerian troops invaded Liama and Egwema following the seizure of

some oil company boats by youths from the area. News reports indicated that the troops burnt houses and killed some people in the area. Thousands of citizens in the area fled to escape the rampaging troops (News Report Journal, January 24, 2002).

**November 1, 2002**, the Nigerian Navy torched Okerenkoko Town. The Chairman of Okerenkoko community, Mr Otuaro Kingsley estimated that 11 houses were burnt down, nine houses were destroyed and millions of naira worth of property was destroyed. (Okafor, 2002, November 13). The community decided to sue the Navy.

**March 13, 2003**, the Nigerian Navy blockaded the Warri waterways. In the process, they beat, tortured and shot at people indiscriminately and commandeered civilian boats. Thereafter, a combined team of the Navy and the Army, at Gbaramatu Kingdom of Ijawland, attacked fishermen and five of those people has never been found again

## Diary of Resistance

### 2003:

Troops are sent to the oilfields amid clashes between rival Ijaw and Itsekiri groups. Around 30 people die. In April 2003 militant group seize four Niger Delta oil rigs, taking 270 people hostage, 97 of them foreigners. After negotiations, the hostages are released.

### 2004:

Pirates in the Niger Delta kill five Nigerians and two Americans working for ChevronTexaco. Fighting between local groups and Nigerian Forces leaves 500 dead in Port Harcourt.

### 2005:

Six oil workers including two Germans are kidnapped, then freed three days later.

### 2006

**January:** Separatist gunmen kidnap four foreign oil workers and blow up a pipeline feeding an export terminal. Five days later, gunmen shot dead several troops and attack a Shell oil plant. The four foreigners – an American, a Briton, a Bulgarian and a Hungarian – are freed at the end of the month, but the group threatened to take further hostages.

**February:** An armoured government helicopter is brought in to fire on Ijaw Communities in Delta State. Following that attack on the communities, separatists kidnap nine foreigners. The attack forces Shell to suspend export from a major terminal. Six of the hostages are freed after a week, but the other three are held until late in March.

**April:** The US firm ExxonMobil briefly evac-

uates non-essential staff from its oil installations due to fear of an attack by militants. A car bomb was used to attack oil tanker trucks, and to warn China not to invest in the Nigerian oil industry.

**May:** Three foreign oil workers, are seized but released after a day. A Nigerian court orders Shell to pay \$1.5 billion in compensation to the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta for environmental damage, but the company says it is appealing the ruling.



**June 2:** Militants abduct six Britons, an American and a Canadian from a Norwegian-run drilling rig off the coast of Bayelsa State.

## The Legal Conspiracy of the Nigerian State against the Niger Delta

The principle of derivation was the major basis for revenue allocation in the days of cocoa (West), groundnut (North) and coal (East). These resources were used to develop the West, North and East of Nigeria leaving the Niger Delta underdeveloped.

However it is a great irony that, when it comes to oil and the resource-blessed people of the Niger Delta, the 1999 constitution could only accord us a beggarly 13 per cent which has not even been faithfully implemented. The repressive government at the centre contrived the onshore-offshore dichotomy to further impoverish our long-suffering people.

Under the existing legal order, all minerals, oil and gas in Nigeria belong to the federal government. It is what the Petroleum Act and the Land Use Act stipulates. Both Acts have been given further legality by the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Relying on these legal but illegitimate instruments, oil companies acquire licences from the central government and appropriate farmlands, forests and stretches of the coast from peasants.

The institutions created by law to monitor the oil industry's compliance with environmental standards, such as the Petroleum Inspectorate Division of the Department of Petroleum Resources and the moribund Federal Environmental

Protection Authority, FEPA, have failed woefully to enforce the rules. In one study, it was concluded that Nigeria's "corrupt political environment enables the law to be prostituted to a corrupt oil mining industry".

## Corporate Social Responsibility

Following the executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues in 1995, Shell, the oil industry and many transnational corporations announced new policies and procedures. These were aimed at repairing the public image of big business so badly tainted by Ken Saro-Wiwa's struggle and the damage in Nigeria and elsewhere. Shell's slogan became 'Profits and Principles'.

Over 10 years on, the façade of corporate social responsibility is nowhere more exposed and challenged than in the polluted, impoverished and conflict-torn villages and towns of the Niger Delta.

The pollution of air, land and water has been ceaseless for over 45 years. Conflict has plagued the region as the

powerful few vie for the spoils from oil. As traditional livelihoods of fishing and farming have been decimated by oil spills and precious little development has resulted from oil revenues, so the growth of disaffection and criminal activity has spread throughout the region. Millions of barrels of oil are being stolen from the leaking infrastructure, providing funds for a widespread escalation in armed violence and political corruption. Over 1000 people per year are dying in armed conflict in the Niger Delta today.

The foreign oil companies blame the government. But the people see the government and the oil companies as inseparable sources of their problems – the companies work with the government at every level.

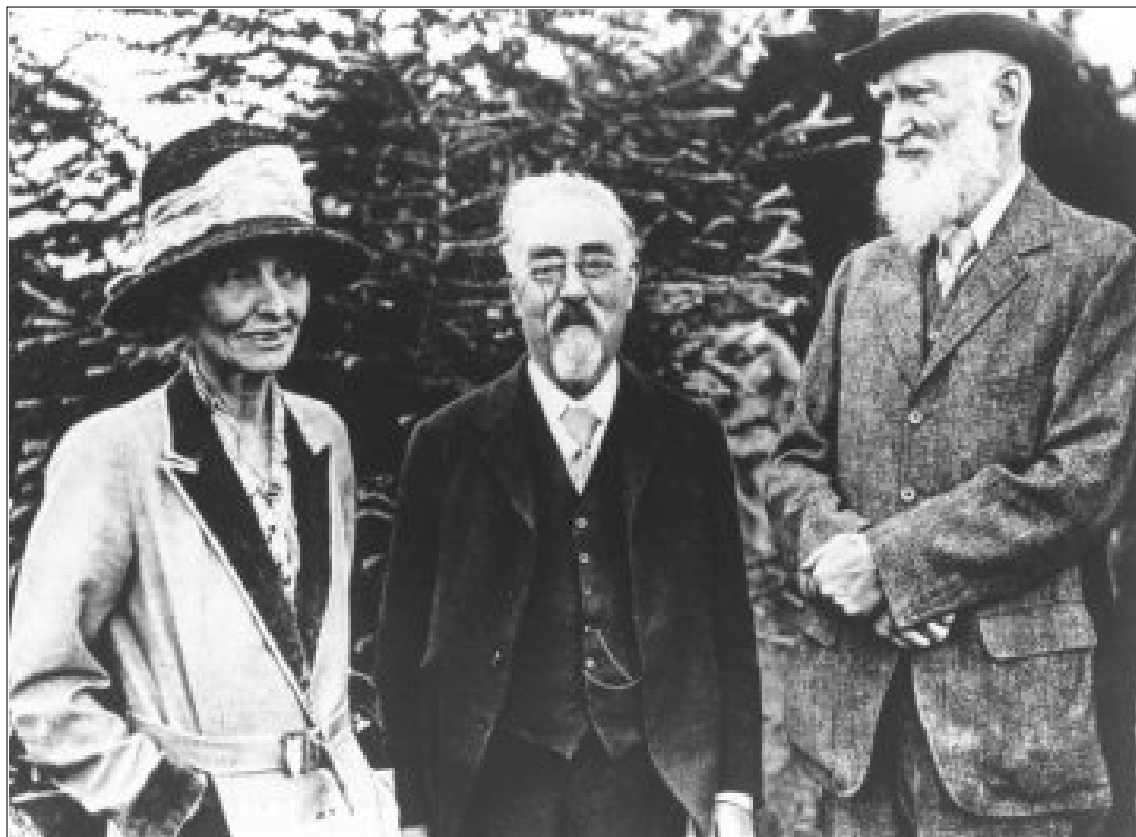
The pollution, underdevelopment, corruption and abuse that the people of the Niger Delta endure have not decreased over the last 10 years – it has increased. The change to a democratic government in 1999 has brought little benefit. The wasteful and polluting practice of burning off the precious gas given off in crude oil production known as 'gas flaring' continues and there are frequent oil spills. Meanwhile, 2 million barrels oil a day are pumped from the region providing \$100 million a day to be shared between the companies and the government. In 2005, the world's major oil companies announced record profits.

In the Niger Delta today there are plenty of profits – for a few – but precious little sign of any principles.

(Sources include IMF, World Bank, UNDP, Shell and BP reports)

# 'A good man fallen among Fabians'

150 years after George Bernard Shaw was born, Paul O'Brien assesses the radicalism of the forgotten man of Irish literature.



Beatrice Webb, 1858-1943; Sidney Webb, 1859-1947; and Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950, founding members of the Fabian Society.

by Paul O'Brien

The rich heritage of Marxist critical theory has made little headway in Ireland and remains the poor relation in contemporary Irish literary theory. The first coherent attempt to put together an Irish Marxist critique of culture centred on those associated with the journal, *The Crane Bag*, in the 1983 issue devoted to 'Socialism and Culture'. The Field Day project launched in Derry in 1980 managed a unique combination of theory and practice in a series of plays, pamphlets and anthologies produced over the following fifteen years.

Then, it was taken for granted that Bernard Shaw would be included in any study of the way in which Irish writers responded to the challenge of developing a specific socialist aesthetic. But Bernard Shaw is now the forgotten man of Irish literature, and not only on the left. His standing has fallen to such an extent that not even the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth in 1856 could persuade the Abbey Theatre in Dublin or

the National Theatre in London (both of whom it was Shaw supported and championed) to revive even one of his plays.

Shaw introduced Ibsen to the English-speaking world and in the process he practically created twentieth-century drama. With *Saint Joan* and *Caesar and Cleopatra* he reinvented the history play, which had been virtually dormant since Elizabethan times. Almost single-handedly he laid the basis for a socialist theatre. Shaw was the most prolific writer of his time; his fifty-two plays in terms of quantity and quality are equalled only in the past by Shakespeare and Ibsen. In addition he was a music and theatre critic and a first-class polemicist.

Shaw became a socialist by reading Marx's *Capital*: "Marx opened my eyes to the facts of history and civilisation ... provided me with a purpose and a mission in life". He loved to proclaim himself a Marxist, even while he mocked the Marxists and Communists and displayed a monumental innocence of

Marxist theory. But his heart remained true to the dreams of socialist revolution, which his Fabian head rejected.

Bernard Shaw was a founder member of the Fabian Society. He was a vigorous political agitator and organiser and the finest platform speaker of his age.

Despite his prodigious pamphleteering on behalf of the Fabian Society, Shaw should not be judged primarily as a theorist. All the contradictions in the world can be found in his political writings. In the preface to *Major Barbara*, Shaw stated that he was and always will be 'a revolutionary writer'. He was a Marxist and an anti-Marxist, a revolutionary and a reformer, a Fabian and a despiser of Fabianism. Like his good friend Sean O'Casey, he was 'a politician who couldn't help being a writer'.

The theatre became a platform for his political views and he deliberately set out to provoke a response from his audience. His plays will outlive the pamphlets and the prefaces,

where at great length he outlined his views on the world. Despite the vagaries of his theories and day-to-day politics, Shaw was an artist whose humanity and social feeling never wavered or never weakened. He hated capitalist society. He hated the sham, hypocrisy and cruelty that debased mankind. His plays are dialectical satires, witty and combative, that exposed capitalism with a passionate intensity that has never been equalled by any writer in the English language.

Shaw never adapted to the dramatic innovations unleashed by the Russian revolution. The experimental work of Brecht, Toller or Piscator and German political theatre in the 1920s seem to have made little impact on him. He remained a lone voice trapped in a world that war and revolution had swept aside. By the 1930s he was a spent force, 'he amused audiences rather than disturbed them'. Bertholt Brecht, the German playwright, when asked what had amused him

most in his life, replied, 'when I heard Shaw is a socialist'. And one can see why Brecht laughed; Shaw's plays are not self-evidently those of a socialist.

However, four or five of the plays that deal directly with the economic, social and class questions reveal the tension between Shaw's socialism and his dramatic vision. Shaw wrote *Widower's Houses* in 1884 shortly after his discovery of Marxism, and it is the nearest he ever came to writing a purely socialist play. Dr. Harry Trench is a thoroughgoing bourgeois liberal living off the income from the family fortune. He is horrified when he discovers that his prospective father-in-law is a rack-renting slum landlord. He is even more horrified when he discovers that his own unearned income derives from the same source. The play lacks the fluency and ease of his later plays, but *Widower's Houses* is no mere polemic; it is a play, which disturbingly shows the soul of man under capitalism 'thoroughly corrupted and deformed'. Shaw insisted that his characters were not exceptions, but typical members of their class. The alternative, socialism, is unspoken; the

play does not inspire the audience with a vision of its own creative strength. The impetus towards socialism comes from the revulsion caused by the grim analysis of the status quo.

Mrs. Warren's Profession, the most challenging and most notorious of Shaw's plays has essentially the same theme as *Widower's Houses*, except that Shaw makes the business of prostitution represent capitalism in general. Shaw was a campaigner for women's liberation and here he makes the point that if workingmen have nothing to sell but their labour, women have nothing to sell but themselves. The subject of the play meant that it was unthinkable that it would be allowed a public performance in the 1890s. Even now, over a hundred years later, audiences sometimes feel a sense of discomfort with the moral tone of the play. However, Shaw's critique of capitalist society is not quite as forceful as in *Widower's Houses*. The protagonists are more tolerable and likeable, a trait that was to become one of Shaw's hallmarks, than in the earlier work. He makes us like Mrs. Warren, the prostitute turned madam, and Vivie her vulgar daughter, as opposed to

the distasteful characters in *Widower's Houses*.

Shaw's plays stand in contrast to the simplistic melodrama of the time, whose villains were cardboard cutout caricatures of reality. Shaw's exploiters were never straw men or women; they were complex characters caught up in moral dilemmas that exposed in a surprising and meaningful way the contradictions inherent in capitalist society.

Hardly any of the work produced in the last twenty years of his life deserves to be revived. But, at least five or six of his plays are classics that will continue to be performed. In a world dominated by poverty and war, Shaw was concerned in his life as well as in his work as much as any other writer, and more than most, with that subject matter.

His strength as a socialist lay in his incomparable style and wit as, almost single-handedly, he set out to awaken the masses from their slumbers and inculcate a civilised socialist outlook. He transformed the ideas of politics into the language of life. In his soul he was a socialist, but he wrote alone, in splendid isolation, and, with no confidence in or contact

with the mass-movement, he could only be a lonely preacher.

In the 1930s, Shaw became an enthusiastic supporter of Stalin. For Shaw, the Soviet Union's five-year plan for economic development represented the triumph of Fabian planning. Stalin was the embodiment of the benevolent dictator of Man and Superman and Major Barbara. But Shaw would also have appreciated the irony that the views of his chief protagonists would not be out of place in Britain's New Labour Party. Lenin called him "a good man fallen among Fabians", and that was his tragedy, but he remained a fighter to the end. He was never afraid to take an unpopular stand and for this he earned the hatred of the authorities. He was a humanist and a great artist who put politics at the centre of his work.

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# Letter from China

By Conor Kostick

The ancient Chinese dynasts used to justify their rule by organising enormous irrigation projects, the mobilisation of tens of thousands of labourers to prevent flooding being a task that only a central authority could achieve.

Today, the main visible evidence for the activity of the Chinese ruling class is in similar undertakings. The mountainous valleys of the west of China are busy with audacious and enormous dam and railway constructions. The largest of which, the Three Gorges Dam, is five times the size of any other in the world. These enormous state-organised efforts will produce a great deal of hydroelectricity for the booming east coast cities, they will also reduce the incidence of flooding, at least until silt builds up to the point that catastrophe threatens.

Every few miles where such construction is taking place, you come across huge building sites, mud and dust. Thousands of workers live in little more than plastic tents while they work on the railways and dams. If you ask what will happen to the millions of people displaced by the water, you find that, theoretically, they are entitled to cheap-priced accommodation in the cities and, for some, a resettlement payment. But corruption is rife in such schemes and most emigration to the cities is likely to be unsupported, creating a vast pool of desperate unskilled labour.

Elsewhere, the only other visible sign of the Chinese authorities are the occasional sight of military vehicles, which rumble up the roads in long convoys while all other traffic pulls over. There is no obvious sign of state intervention in the local economy.

As you travel through rural China, the narrow roads are filled with the ubiquitous blue trucks – massive vehicles, stacked to the top with vegetables for the cities. From time to time you pass fields in which agricultural labourers are working together to reap the crops and fill the truck. For some farmers, the work is clearly very profitable: impressive tall stone houses cluster together, each with a satellite dish prominently displayed. Beside the road, however, are very many more houses that are little more than shacks, covered in the dust of the constant traffic.

A farmer's climb from poverty to wealth is clearly very precarious here. Twice we passed road accidents. In one, a blue truck had lost out in a battle with an orange digger. The cabin of the truck was crushed completely flat. There could be no doubt that

the driver had lost his life. But, since there is no insurance for vehicles in China, this tragedy would not only have been one for the driver and his family, but also the community who owned the truck. Unless it was one of the ever-growing fleets controlled by 'middle men', entrepreneurs rapidly earning a fortune by their linking of the countryside to the expanding cities.

Chengdu is a major city of some ten million people in west China. The official figures cannot be trusted, but their report that industry grew 20 percent this year and



Early in the morning tens of thousands of people pour into the city on foot, bicycle, scooter, car, truck and bus.

services 11 percent might not be too exaggerated. Life is frenetic and working hours are long. Early in the morning tens of thousands of people pour into the city on foot, bicycle, scooter, car, truck and bus. Their return home seemed to be some ten hours later.

Large factories are found in estates in the suburbs, their skyscraper headquarters dominating the inner city. Throughout the city, grouped around giant housing high-rises, are an uncountable number of small businesses. This street is devoted to the sale of rubber tyres, that to fax machines, another to mobile phones, another to air conditioning units. There is no obvious difference between any of the twenty or so shops that sit side by side with identical goods on display. Hence the importance of personal contacts. It is from the thriving, unregulated, interaction of client and buyer among these petty outlets that corruptions begins: the bottom of a food chain that leads to tales of extraordinary wheeling and dealing at the top, involving figures against which the contents of Ireland's brown envelopes seem like small change.

The authorities claim only four percent unemployment, but this figure is lower than it might be due to the enormous numbers

employed at very low rates on civic projects, such as sweeping the streets with brooms, or waving red flags at traffic while ineffectually blowing whistles at those who non-stop ignore the signal system. The shopping centres in the middle of the city testify to the growth of a huge, prosperous, middle class. All of the world's most exclusive retailers have outlets here, and they are busy.

There is little visible sign of discontent, but then, with the exception of Hong Kong, that is not likely in the national media, still carefully controlled by the state. Communist domination of intellectual life though, is not as tight as it once was. The bubbling of economic activity at the base level has produced a situation where millions of people have mobile phones and can text one another without fear. Hundreds of thousands have access to the Internet at home, not to mention the permanently busy Internet cafes. Although China tries to block certain websites, there are well known ways around their censorship system. Even printed material is inadvertently growing beyond the control of the censor, with a proliferation of new publishing houses. Not that revolutionaries could operate openly here, but they could operate. This is especially true of the Universities. The fact that

graduate unemployment is growing and that there are a certain amount of students whose dress is unconventional, in a punk kind of way, suggests that there is a sizeable milieu whose loyalty to the authorities is weak.

There are glaring contradictions within China, most evidently between the rich and poor of the countryside and the cities. There are shocking examples of injustice, involving the withholding of months of pay to workers, which are giving rise to anger, protests and strikes. But is impossible from the outside to say how close China is to another Tiananmen Square.

The most dangerous moment for any regime is when, after a period of relatively lenient rule, they feel it necessary to step up tighter control over the population. People are aroused to fight for rights that they have tasted more easily than those that are aspirational. In China's case the rapid expansion of the economy is leading to a decentralisation that weakens the grip of the Communist Party. This is all very well for the time being, but if the economy falters and the Communist Party find it time for a new turn, they might find that their control over events is not what it once was.



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