

14 De-alienation, regime change and power

A World to Win has shown that you cannot reform or regulate global capitalism. Moreover, a merging of economic with political power has transformed the way the capitalist state functions. The state no longer attempts to solve the serious problems humanity faces and increasingly directly expresses corporate interests and objectives. People are more alienated than ever as a result of the globalisation process and this gives rise to often unbearable tensions within individuals and society as a whole. The state's role in protecting its citizens against outside threat has turned into its opposite through the "war on terror". This has made ordinary citizens targets and potential victims of both oppression and terrorist attacks.

The state remains the lynchpin of the social system of capitalism, holding it all together. It provides the essential ideological, political, social, legal, educational and military frameworks without which society in general and capitalism in particular cannot function. Therefore, the state – who controls it, the way it is organised and in whose interests – is our main political focus. As the present state is capitalist in its nature and functions, it follows that it cannot serve a society with entirely different foundations or be used to create such a society. Without new forms of state power, it is inconceivable that we could reorganise the economy along collective, self-management lines, put an end to war and act on the ecological crisis. Without a comprehensive regime change we cannot breathe new life into

democratic achievements and make the right to vote mean something again.

We have argued that the major problems facing humanity are caused ultimately by the alienation of people's labour and natural resources from them by existing social relations. These relations are founded on private ownership of the means of producing goods and services for profit. The exploitation of human labour in this way is the barrier to progress that we must sweep aside. This is the road to de-alienation. For this to happen, the domination of capital that is expressed through the corporations and the state powers which act for them must be ended.

Human beings, under the present system have taken things as far as they can, so progress now depends on a transfer of power from minority ownership to mass democratic ownership. The challenge is to take power from the minority. That means taking control and then *remaking* (see Chapter 8 for our proposals) the state while encouraging and supporting the democratising of ownership and control of workplaces. One without the other will not succeed.

A Gallup International poll unveiled in November 2002, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, showed a massive swing towards distrust of corporations, governments, politicians and democratic institutions. The poll, commissioned by global business leaders, interviewed 15,000 people in 15 countries and found that 48% expressed "little or no trust" in global companies. Some 52% expressed similar scepticism about "large national businesses".

The poll concluded: "Trust has been eroded far beyond the corporate sector. Two-thirds of those surveyed were of the opinion that their country was not 'governed by the will of the people'. Additional opinion polls coupled with declining voter turnout – particularly among the young – point to an increasing disenchantment with politicians and political institutions. The current breakdown of trust also reflects an uncertainty about contemporary values."

These and many other surveys reveal that most people feel that they have little or no control over the forces that really determine

what happens on the planet. They know that more than ever before the mass of people are not represented politically by the existing forms of democracy. As the poll added: "There is also declining trust that the world is going in the right direction. Today, a majority of citizens across the 15 countries do not agree with the direction in which the world is moving. This disagreement is up significantly in half the countries surveyed, compared to a year ago. The research delivers further evidence of citizen distrust in the democratic process: fully two-thirds of those surveyed world-wide disagree that their country is 'governed by the will of the people'."

But while they may feel powerless about the direction in which the world is led by corporations and governments, people have no choice but to confront the problems which they face at all levels, from the strictly personal to the public and political. They may be indifferent to the hollow words of politicians but they join all kinds of clubs and non-profit organisations in large numbers. They try to overcome their powerlessness by finding other ways of doing things that are not based simply on personal gain and interest. They participate in mass marathons and sports events. They contribute generously to charities and fundraising for the less advantaged. They resist their employers when they encroach on hard-won conditions and intensify the work process.

Despite all attempts by governments to force people to accept dependence on the market for crucial services like health, education and pensions, the overwhelming majority still believe that there should be public provision according to need. They see right through the spin about "choice" and "modernisation".

The British Social Attitudes survey 2003 reported that "increasing material affluence and a changing occupational structure have had *less* impact than we might have expected", adding: "Support for better public services such as health and education is as high now as it ever has been. The public continues to believe that access to publicly funded health care should be based on need rather than income... grants not loans... Although income inequality may have grown, there is no evidence that it is tolerated to any greater extent now than was the case twenty

years ago. Equally we have also uncovered little evidence to suggest that growing material affluence has reduced class differences in social attitudes and values... The result is a society where social class still seems to make a difference to the attitudes and values of its citizens.”

People globally are trying to overcome the forces that are oppressing them in a variety of ways, as they decide that governments do not represent them at all. The mass demonstrations in February 2003 against the invasion of Iraq were the high point of people “voting with their feet” as tens of millions took to the streets around the world. It was a watershed moment in the attempt to force governments to listen to those they are supposed to represent.

Undeterred by their governments’ attempts to justify the “war against terror”, in Britain and elsewhere, people have expressed opposition to the occupation of Iraq on a scale never seen before in history. Mass demonstrations are an attempt to have a political voice denied by the traditional institutions of parliamentary democracy. And they confounded the cynics who believe that people will only ever go on the streets in defence of direct self-interest. The demonstrations proved that people are prepared to act if they see a possibility of their actions making a real difference – in other words, to stop governments. It was no accident that numbers dwindled dramatically after British and American forces marched in, and it seemed impossible to alter this course of events.

What is not so plain is that ordinary people *do* have the power to change these circumstances. At present those in charge have the power and we have very little or none at all. If two million could not change Blair’s mind, then sheer pressure of numbers on the street poses the question: how can people determine the course of history in accordance with their aspirations?

Within that question lies the problem itself. Is it actually a question of *changing the minds* of those in power as those who engage in protests of various kinds believe? Can the existing political structures be modified and moulded to fit the needs and will of the majority? Or do we have to get to grips with deeper problems? What is it that makes us think we cannot change

things and achieve democratic control over the planet's resources and the way they are used? In what ways are people prevented from having control over their lives? What is it that separates people from power? These are the questions revolutionary organisations must answer in a concrete way if they are to win the support of the majority to take and remould state power.

Within globalised capitalism itself changes have gone on which can facilitate the transfer of power. Production has had to adopt an increasingly socialised form, drawing in workers in different countries organised to work co-operatively. All the key decisions are taken by salaried employees. Millions have therefore experienced potential power in their workplace – except that it remains out of reach while the reality remains private control of their labour. Nevertheless, we can glimpse a future organised rationally and quite differently from today's world of ruthless competition and work until you drop. The revolution in technology has also opened up dramatic possibilities for addressing human needs and solving problems. This technology is equally the product of human labour. A revolution in communications means that states and governments cannot lie their way through life without being found out very quickly. We can also keep in touch and organise mass movements in new ways, using mobile phones, e-mail and messaging which the state finds increasingly difficult to control.

Finally, globalisation has resulted in a broadening out of the working class to include the vast majority in society. Despite de-industrialisation, there are more than 26 million people who work for an employer in Britain, while another 3.8 million are self-employed. The once privileged middle class is largely a thing of the past because no job is safe in the global market economy and exploitation is intense. A MORI poll in 2002 revealed that two-thirds of British adults considered themselves to be working class.

On the other side economic power is concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. We indeed are many and they are few. This new working class is the only revolutionary force in society capable of transforming society in a progressive way because in its very being it is in direct opposition to corporate wealth and power.

The working class's future interests lie in realising its potential power by converting the forces of production into socially-owned and controlled resources for common use.

History shows that in extraordinary times people are capable of being altruistic, if they see the coming together of their own interests with those of others and can act as a class and a unified social force. People do this when they are able to, when the social environment allows them to and when there is a perspective for success. Indeed, inspired by the idea of collective endeavour, people can act in ways that defy all predictions and stereotypes. The history of Britain reveals the power of class and community traditions, defiance and contempt for the state. These continue in less dramatic ways in the everyday sacrifices of people, including those who care for the vulnerable and those who frequently put their lives on the line such as firefighters.

No one is suggesting that struggling for power is not a complex task. It requires theoretical and practical preparation and uncompromising leadership that has its sights firmly on the main prize. History is full of examples of revolutionary change, from Britain in the 17th century, France and America in the 18th century, Russia and China in the first part of the 20th century, the revolutions for colonial liberation and more recently the largely peaceful overthrow of Stalinist dictatorships.

A mass transfer of power is not the same as a coup carried out by a tiny minority within the state. Challenged by a mass upheaval with a determined leadership, the control exercised by the ruling class will weaken and fracture. Mass movements in themselves do not lead to violence, as the anti-war protests of 2003 showed. If the ruling élite is overwhelmed it will be unable to strike back.

The conditions for revolutionary change are emerging day by day as the contradictions of life under global capitalism pile up and reach breaking point. In Britain, the history of past struggles and sacrifices, achievements, victories and defeats, are with us. We can and will walk in the footsteps of the Peasants Revolt, the struggle of the Levellers during the English Revolution, the Chartists who fought for the vote and built a national convention outside parliament. The 1880s saw the formation of mass trade

unions, followed by the sacrifices of the Suffragettes to achieve votes for women. The building of the Labour Party, the General Strike of 1926, the sacrifice of ordinary people in two imperialist world wars, the building of the welfare state, the bitter struggles against Thatcherism and de-industrialisation, and now against the market state and its foreign wars for global corporate interests all go to make up an inspiring history which will serve us well as we set out to overturn the old order.

A revolutionary change is obviously fraught with difficulties, dangers and uncertainties. But we already live in uncertain times, where state violence is used to impose so-called free market economies as in Iraq. The one guarantee is that leaving things as they are will spell disaster for the planet. You have the opportunity to make a difference, to contribute to a new chapter in human history. You should take it and make it. In 1848, in their stirring *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels penned two famous sentences that still have real significance for today: "*The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.*"

Let's make it happen

Now that you have read the book, the challenge is to put the ideas into practice. You have the opportunity to take part in shaping the future in these ways:

- ▶ **Come to *A World to Win* events.** We are organising local discussions and debates as well as a conference. These aim at taking forward the proposals set out in the book. For details go to www.aworldtowin.net or write to *A World to Win*, PO Box 942 London SW1V 2AR
- ▶ **Contribute to the discussion.** Send your comments, ideas and alternatives to us and we will publish them on our bulletin board to keep the debate going
- ▶ **Spread the word.** Set up discussions about the book with your friends and work colleagues, at your trade union branch, book club or with your fellow students at school or university. Let us know and we'll send a speaker
- ▶ **Promote the book.** Help push sales of *A World to Win* by getting it into public libraries, on to school and university reading lists. Let your friends know about it and publicise the book on e-lists. You could always write a short review for a website or magazine.
- ▶ **Tell us about events.** If you know about any events, demonstrations or festivals to sell the book at, let us know.

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