

Reform or Revolution? Why the Left failed so miserably

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Theme: [History](#)

Global Research, October 26, 2009

Williambowles.info 23 October 2009

It's not fair to leave you hanging like that (see [Reform or Revolution?](#)), we really need to know why the left in the so-called developed world has failed so miserably to carry out its allotted task, a task laid down by our ancestors who spilt much blood, sweat and tears.

It occurs to me that the left is trapped in its own history, a history that views the industrial working class as the natural 'partner' in the revolutionary project but without recognizing that it is now a shadow of its former self. Compounding this paradox is the lack of debate over who is to take their place, or join the struggle?

As I stated in the previous essay I contend that the road to ruin started when organized labour handed over the reins of power to the 'party of labour', a decision that had two related consequences: it disconnected the grassroots from its leadership which in turn, led to the loss of all democratic control, for within a few short years of the founding of the Labour Party it was *incorporated* into the ruling political class thus ending its potential as a party of revolution.

In other words, power *must* flow upward, without it we are at the mercy of the 'leadership' (which reminds me of a pal of mine in Johannesburg who started up a bar in Yeoville where we all used to hang out called 'The Politburo', sub-titled, 'Don't tell the leadership' or as another comrade used to say in the heat of debate, 'Caution comrade').

In turn, parties to the left of the Labour Party also followed the same model of 'political centralism', with decision-making in the hands of an elite, who of course, have all the answers. In turn, a great deal of effort (perhaps more) was spent on internecine battles between the various left elites over who was the most 'marxist'. Poor old Karl, a person who was more than anything else a creative artist, in every sense the complete antithesis of what the left leadership has become (and had he been alive still, he would no doubt have endured the wrath of the comrades for something or other).

How then can we as socialists talk about socialist democracy if our own structures are not democratic? Where decisions are made behind closed doors, where rules are flouted and dictats handed down from on high? Is it any wonder therefore, that we are not to be trusted? Without a truly democratic left we will forever wander in the hinterland of 'dissident' politics, fragmented, divided and ineffectual.

More to the point, how can we recover from this totally messed up situation? I'm loathe to suggest yet another party of the left, please spare us that. That leaves me thinking about how one could bring *all* the parties of the left together? Okay, yet another 'socialist alliance',

but hey I'm thinking out loud here. Yet without a revolutionary organization to lead us, what hope is there of stopping the Empire's drive toward Armageddon (its 'solution' to the crisis of capital)?

Yet people continue to struggle and resist whether it be against the closure of a local health clinic or yet another airport runway. The problem is that each struggle occurs in isolation (so-called single-issues) and once the problem is resolved whether through success or failure, the resistance inevitably fades away.

How to unite them all? How to establish the connection between all these individual struggles, to capitalism?

The issue of climate change is a good example of the problems we confront, with those involved broadly falling into two camps: One sees capitalism as the obstacle (the Red) and the other that for example 'we consume too much' (the Green). Yet of course the two positions are actually one and the same thing depending on how you interpret the evidence.

It boils down to whether or not to really do something about climate change you have to get rid of capitalism or can capitalism 'heal itself' somehow? (see the video of John Bellamy Foster talking about, ["Capitalism and Climate Change"](#) for an excellent analysis). And what goes for climate change goes for all our major problems.

So far, the evidence is against the latter, things are going from bad to disastrous, yet the fact is, millions of people really do care about what's happening to our planet including where we live. But can individual or small group actions bring about real change when they're disconnected from all the other 'small challenges' that are going on, even a couple of miles away?

And the plain fact is that we have hundreds if not thousands of small activist groups beavering away precisely because there is no coherent alternative being presented. Let's face it, on the major issues of race, gender and now climate change, the left has been left behind and this is a situation that goes back decades. And the reasons for this are not hard to spot.

The struggle for socialism in the UK has its roots in the labour movement, a movement that was and is run for the most part by white men, for white men, this is our legacy. With the effective demise of the industrial working class, the remaining trade unions are locked in a deadly embrace with the state as the example of the postal workers' union the CWU [demonstrates](#), with unions that fund their own destruction even as they bring workers out on strike! This is betrayal on a grand scale.

So, aside from the those in trade unions (when they're not being stabbed in the back by their leaders), the rest of us have *no* representation at all ('my' Labour MP supported the invasion of Iraq and when challenged on my doorstep as he vainly sought my vote, his argument for getting my vote was that we have to keep the Tories out!).

So, how do we get all these individual actions working toward a common objective? Answers on a postcard please.

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