

REVIEW ARTICLE

A Programme for Global Justice

Walden Bello, *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy*, Zed Books, 2002. Paperback, 160pp, £9.99. Alex Callinicos, *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, Polity Press, 2003. Paperback, 192pp, £13.90. George Monbiot, *The Age of Consent*, HarperCollins 2003. Hardback, 274pp, £15.99.

Reviewed by Chris Gray

THE ANTI-CAPITALIST Movement is beginning to say more about the kind of world economy it wants and less about the deficiencies of the status quo. Out of a number of recent contributions to the debate I propose to review these three, by Walden Bello, Alex Callinicos and George Monbiot.

Of the three, Bello's work is shortest on concrete proposals. This doesn't mean it is not worth reading, but it does not contain the equivalent of Callinicos's and Monbiot's positive programmes. This is because Bello quite correctly holds that "a strategy of *deconstruction* must necessarily proceed alongside one of *reconstruction*" (*Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy*, p.100). Hence Bello's main emphasis is on the need for the abolition of the IMF, World Bank and – most important of all – the World Trade Organisation. The reasons for this stance are, I think, well known by now. I will therefore concentrate on the proposals put forward by Alex Callinicos and George Monbiot.

Alex Callinicos outlines what he calls a "Transitional Programme" on pages 132 to 139 of his book. Its individual points are as follows:

1. Immediate cancellation of Third World debt.
2. Introduction of the "Tobin Tax" on international currency transactions.
3. Restoration of capital controls.
4. Introduction of a universal basic income.
5. Reduction of the working week.
6. Defence of public services and renationalisation of privatised industries.

7. Progressive taxation to finance public services and redistribute wealth and income.

8. Abolition of immigration controls and extension of citizenship rights.

9. Measures to counter impending environmental catastrophe.

10. Dissolution of the military-industrial complex.

11. Defence of civil liberties.

This programme is fine – as far as it goes – with one caveat, which will appear later on this article. The points about the Tobin Tax and reintroduction of capital controls were attacked in a recent review in the *Weekly Worker* (10 July 2003) for being reformist and harking back to the old outdated conception of progressive "national" capitalism. As I see it, this is by no means the case. The point about the Tobin Tax, which is to be levied on all foreign exchange transactions, is that it has to be applied on an international scale in order to succeed. According to Callinicos: "The most detailed study of the tax, by Heikki Pado-maki, a scholar involved in ATTAC, suggests that it could be initiated by as few as thirty states, provided that they covered at least 20 per cent of the foreign exchange market" (*An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, p.78). Similar considerations do not apply to capital controls, but they are nonetheless indispensable – and again, the greater their geographical extent, the greater the degree of control over transnational corporations that results.

Despite the usefulness of Callinicos's proposals,

the best contribution of the three is that of George Monbiot. However, before discussing his recommendations it is necessary to take up some assertions of his which cannot be allowed to go unchallenged.

George Monbiot begins with a defence of democracy, which is well argued. But he prefaces it with a consideration of Marxism and Anarchism, in the course of which he is unfair to both. I will leave it to the Anarchists to defend themselves against George (which they are quite capable of doing) and concentrate on his view of Marx.

George sees the *Communist Manifesto* as the be-all and end-all of Marxist politics: there is no need to delve any further, we have it all here, especially the warts. He writes: "It seems to me that this treatise contains, in theoretical form, all the oppressions which were later visited on the people of communist nations. The problem with its political prescriptions is not that they have been corrupted, but that they have been rigidly applied. Stalin's politics and Mao's were far more Marxist than, for example, those of the compromised – and therefore more benign – governments of Cuba or the Indian state of Kerala" (*The Age of Consent*, p.26).

This is grotesque. George Monbiot appears unaware of the salient work of Hal Draper on the relation between Marx and democracy. At the risk of boring those readers who are familiar with the arguments, I give here a summary of Draper's conclusions.

In *The Two Souls of Socialism* (Bookmarks 1996) Draper points out that for Marx's immediate predecessors – Babeuf and the so-called "Utopian socialists" (especially Saint-Simon) – socialism would necessarily be implemented by a minority, either "the rich and powerful" or a conscious vanguard. Marx breaks decisively with this approach. He began his political career as a left-liberal journalist, and wrote his first published article against press censorship. Before Marx and Engels joined the organisation that became the Communist League they insisted that "everything conducive to superstitious authoritarianism be struck out of the rules" and that the main committee be elected by the whole membership (pp.11-12). The *Manifesto* later appeared under the League's auspices: in it Marx speaks of the need for a "self-conscious, independent movement of the vast majority in the interests of the vast majority" (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol.6, p.495). Further, "the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy. The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of

production in the hands of the State, *i.e. of the proletariat organised as the ruling class*" (p.504, my emphasis – CG).

Marx's pronouncements on this question did not stop there. Marx analysed carefully the whole experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, with obvious approval of many of its constitutional provisions, principally those governing the election and remuneration of representatives, magistrates and judges, whose positions were to be "elective, responsible, and revocable" (*Collected Works*, Vol.22, p.332).

In *The Civil War in France* he outlined the Commune's proposed national constitution, whereby: "The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents" (*ibid*).

In *The "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" from Marx to Lenin* (Monthly Review Press, 1987) Draper further observes that: "It is clear that, in Marx's eyes, the Commune took no 'dictatorial' measures – if the present-day meaning of the word is used. Indeed there had been a proposal inside the Commune to do just that, as the military situation grew more and more precarious before the military power of the Versailles government. The Blanquist-Jacobin majority of the Commune proposed to set up ... a Committee of Public Safety, with special arbitrary powers. The debate ... was acrimonious; when the proposal was adopted, the Minority walked out of the Commune. This split would have attracted more attention from historians than it has if the final Versailles assault on the city had not commenced at virtually the moment of the split, making it academic as all pitched in to the military defense. But in hindsight it is important to note that the antidictatorial Minority represented most of the International people as well as the Proudhonists, and in particular it included all the figures who had any special connection with Marx or who showed any tendency to look to his ideas (for example, Serrailier, who was practically Marx's personal representative; Frankel, Longuet, Varlin)" (p.30).

Marx's position in his early *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* should also be borne in mind. In this work he defends democracy and has some nasty things to say about the bureaucracy as a class.

I hope I have said enough to indicate how unwise it is to take the *Communist Manifesto* as the definitive expression of Marx's (and Marxist) political views. It is like taking Machiavelli's politics

from *The Prince* alone and ignoring the *Discorsi*. It is true that the *Manifesto* does tend to go overboard in favour of state ownership and control, but we should at all costs refrain from treating Marx's writings in the manner of the Holy Koran or the law of Moses, from which not one jot or tittle shall pass, until all be fulfilled (Matthew v, 18). If the ends of the revolution can be attained in places without introducing state ownership (e.g. via co-operation), so much the better. It is necessary to adopt a pragmatic approach.

Draper's book on *The "Dictatorship of the Proletariat"* gives some indication of how later Marxists tended to veer away from the positions of Marx and Engels as outlined above. Plekhanov, for example, seems to have held the view that after the revolution the only ones allowed freedom would be "ourselves" (p.39). Moreover, in a debate at the Second Congress of the RSDLP (1903) there was support for what one might call "Jacobin" measures as part of proletarian dictatorship, support which came not only from members of the future Bolshevik faction but also from those later known as Mensheviks (see pp.69-73). Nonetheless Lenin wrote: "Whoever wants to reach socialism by any other path than that of political democracy, will inevitably arrive at conclusions that are absurd and reactionary both in the economic and the political sense" ('Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution', *Collected Works*, Vol.9, p.29).

In hiding in Finland in 1917 Lenin wrote his book *The State and Revolution*, in which he set out what he regarded as the Marxist position on the state. He declared: "Until the 'higher' phase of communism arrives, the socialists demand the *strictest* control by society *and by the state* over the measure of labour and the measure of consumption; but this control must *start* with the expropriation of the capitalists, with the establishment of workers' control over the capitalists, and must be exercised not by a state of bureaucrats, but by a state of the *armed workers*" (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol.25, p.470, emphasis in the original).

Unfortunately Lenin discovered that the new state established in October 1917 was not a state of the armed workers but rather more a renewal of the old pre-revolutionary state, which generated initiatives of its own. When he realised this, and likewise the role of Stalin as General Secretary of the Party in promoting and developing these initiatives, Lenin began a campaign, from his sick-bed, aiming to undo some of the effects of his earlier revolutionary zeal. This campaign is recorded in Moshe Lewin's book *Lenin's Last Struggle* (Pluto Press, 1975). Lenin's last writings, such as 'On Co-operation' and 'Better Fewer, but Better', spring from this background.

Since those days a lot of water has flowed under the bridge, and we are all well aware of the atrocities committed in the name of socialism by such as Josef Vissarionovich Djughashvili (Stalin), Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung, Nicolae Ceausescu and Pol Pot, to name only the most glaring perpetrators. In my view, the so-called "Marxist theory of the state" is deficient and needs replacing. But it will not help the process of replacement if we attribute to Marx views that he did not hold, or give undue importance to the prescriptions of the *Communist Manifesto*, many of which are out of date – what left-wing politician calls these days for the abolition of the right of inheritance?

George Monbiot complains that Marx fails to address the key political question, viz., who will guard the guards? "Democratic systems contain, in theory at least, certain safeguards, principally in the form of elections, designed to ensure that those who exercise power over society do so in its best interests. The government is supposed to entertain a healthy fear of its people, for the people are supposed to be permitted to dismiss their government. The *Communist Manifesto* offers no such defences" (*The Age of Consent*, pp.28-9).

I would argue that in the *Manifesto* the democratic defences are in fact taken as read – the objective of the "battle of democracy" is universal adult suffrage, which continues after the workers' party (or parties) gains (or gain) the necessary majority support. Further to that, the Paris Commune established the all-important right of recall, whereby representatives may be challenged on their policies. Ironically George Monbiot himself invokes this principle on page 120 of his book: he appears unaware that Marx himself would have approved. As for some of Uncle Charlie's followers, one should recall that Marx once said "*ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas marxiste*" – "I tell you one thing, I'm not a Marxist".

It is a real pleasure to turn from George Monbiot's denunciations of Marxists and Anarchists to his proposals for the world economy, which, as he says, are "crystallized" in four principal projects, namely "a democratically elected world parliament; a democratized United Nations General Assembly, which captures the powers now vested in the Security Council; an International Clearing Union, which automatically discharges trade deficits and prevents the accumulation of debt; [and] a Fair Trade Organization, which restrains the rich while emancipating the poor" (*The Age of Consent*, p.4).

The need for a World Parliament derives from the manifest deficiencies of the United Nations Organisation, especially the Security Council, in which the Five Permanent Members (the US, the

UK, France, Russia and China) are able to obstruct democracy by exercising their power of veto. This power extends to cover proposals for the reform of the organisation (see Articles 108 and 109 of the UN Charter). The General Assembly similarly suffers from the fact that the ten thousand inhabitants of the Pacific island of Tuvalu have one vote and so do the ten billion inhabitants of India. The UN needs a thoroughgoing overhaul, but this is only possible if the Five Permanent Members agree. Accordingly we need a campaign for a proper democratic World Parliament. This parliament may as well consist of 600 representatives, provided that the constituencies be of equal size. That will ensure equal representation for all citizens, regardless of size of country – indeed there is the added advantage that some constituencies will extend across national borders. Representatives should not have connections with any national government (p.88). The campaign should focus initially on assembling funds in order to find out if there exists sufficient support for the idea: if there is, then an electoral commission could be set up to design a plan for elections. Some governments might bar their nationals from casting the requisite vote, but this could be “overcome” by taking a vote among exiles or expatriates (p.93). Once established, the parliament’s task would be to “hold other powers to account” (p.99).

Socialists might well be sceptical of the worth of such a parliament: after all, democracy is no guarantee that representatives will make the right choices, and we could well end up with yet another bourgeois assembly, given the current climate of world opinion. Against this, in my view, the traditional left-wing argument for participating in elected assemblies are decisive – we should use every possible platform, however unpromising, in order to put our case. Critics may object that the World Social Forums are perfectly adequate, but participation in these gatherings is by self-selection: such assemblies therefore lack the degree of influence that a genuinely representative international assembly would have. The World Parliament, if we could establish it, would serve as an important focus, and a campaign for it would have similar effects.

“We should likewise campaign for the democratization of the UN General Assembly. Such a body would take over the Security Council’s current global security role. Each nation’s vote would be weighted according to both the number of people it represents and the democratic legitimacy it possesses.

“The government of Tuvalu, representing 10,000 people, would, then, have a far smaller vote than the government of China. But China, in turn, would possess far fewer votes than it would if its

government was democratically elected. Rigorous means of measuring democratization are beginning to be developed by bodies such as the Centre for Business and Policy Studies in Sweden and Democratic Audit in the United Kingdom. It would not be hard, using their criteria, to compile an objective global index of democracy. Governments, under this system, would be presented with a powerful incentive to democratize: the more democratic they became, the greater would be their influence over world affairs. No nation would be would possess a veto” (p.133).

It would be useful to have more detail on how this would work in practice.

Campaigning for these changes enables us to outline the sort of world economy we want, which brings us naturally to the remainder of what George Monbiot has in mind. The proposal for an International Clearing Union is basically that advanced nearly sixty years ago by that much neglected politician John Maynard Keynes. Keynes argued at Bretton Woods in 1944 that it would be advisable to set up a special bank, the ICU, which would issue its own currency, which he called *bancor*. This currency would be used to monitor trade deficits and surpluses. The bank would provide overdraft facilities to countries with a trade deficit, but would also regulate states’ trade surpluses:

“Any member nation with a *bancor* credit balance which was more than half the size of its overdraft facility [the latter being fixed at half the average value of trade over the previous five years] would be charged interest at the rate of ten per cent. It would also be obliged to increase the value of its currency and permit the export of capital. If, by the end of the year, its credit balance exceeded the value of its permitted overdraft, the surplus would be confiscated. All these surpluses and interest payments would be placed in the Clearing Union’s Reserve Fund” (p.162).

The system would therefore tend to ensure that trade surpluses would be redeployed in the interests of world trade as a whole: richer economies would either contribute to ICU funds directly or would move to reduce trade surpluses by purchasing overseas goods, a process that would ultimately lead to the purchase of goods produced by the poorer nations. It was this proposal that the US negotiators adamantly refused to accept: had they done so, a lot of the problems we now face would not obtain, and the world would be a happier place. The plan should be reactivated now, with one or two adjustments (see pp.169-70).

Fair trade obviously requires measures designed to deal with the mountain of debt currently owed by the ex-colonial and “non-metropolitan”

economies. Here George argues that debt cancellation per se is not the requisite aim. What is required is that the debtor nations offer to continue repayment on certain conditions, namely:

“the replacement of the IMF and the World Bank with an arrangement which automatically establishes a balance of trade.... The poor would thus offer the rest of the world a choice: it can opt either for a soft landing – a gentle transition from the existing system to the new one, and a staggered redemption of the debts accumulated as a result of the IMF’s past mismanagement – or a crash landing. The markets will demand the soft one. Both courses of action will lead to the cancellation of debt. One of them, the crash landing, will internationalize the financial crisis already afflicting many of the indebted countries. The other will introduce a system which, while denying the G8 nations their control of the rest of the world, will provide a more stable global economy, less prone to the cycles of boom and bust.... The poor nations need not wait for the rich to establish a Clearing Union. They can found it themselves, fix the value of their currencies against the bancor (or whatever they might call it), then invite the rich countries, at the point of their financial gun,

to join” (pp.177-8).

It could be objected that the adoption of such a course requires the overthrow of those ex-colonial or non-metropolitan elites who see their interests as tied to Western ones, but that is not a decisive counter-argument: the elites must be overthrown in any case. Anything which helps us to achieve that should be welcomed. The same goes for George’s notion of a Fair Trade Organisation charged with enforcing civilized standards on transnational companies – UN guidelines already exist in this area (see p.229). Internationally also no company should be allowed to dominate a particular market sector in deleterious fashion (see pp.233-4). The WTO, of course, must be scrapped.

There are a number of other recommendations in *The Age of Consent*, but there is no need for a discussion of them here. What we already have outlined represents the main thrust of George Monbiot’s ideas. With the proviso already made concerning the treatment of international debt, it is clear that George’s proposals fit in well with those put forward by Alex Callinicos, as well as opening up a strategy for their implementation. In my view the main course is now set, and the ball is in our court. ■

DIANE ABBOTT SELF-DESTRUCTS

CONVINCED AS I am that socialism in Britain will have been fully achieved only when the last Andrew Neil has been strangled in the guts of the last Michael Portillo, I’d long regarded Diane Abbott’s jolly banter with her right-wing fellow presenters on BBC1’s *This Week* programme as highly dubious. It seemed to me that such public displays of mateyness with enemies of the labour movement sent a message to viewers that she didn’t take her own politics terribly seriously. But I was persuaded by the argument that her television performances did at least put across a favourable image of the left, by suggesting that contrary to rumour (and, some might say, reality) we are actually normal human beings not entirely devoid of a sense of humour.

As it turned out, in this case first impressions were not far wrong. The Hackney North and Stoke Newington MP’s decision to send her 12-year-old son to a £10,000-a-year private school has conclusively demonstrated her light-minded attitude towards the political principles she was supposed to uphold.

The arguments against private education scarcely need rehearsing here. There can be no possible excuse for such a prominent figure from the Labour left publicly spurning the local comprehensive schools to which the vast majority of her constituents, black and white, send their children, and taking advantage of her superior wealth to buy educational privilege for her own offspring. The objection that Abbott had no alternative but to put the interests of her child above ideology is little more than a liberal version of the Thatcherite view that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families.

When the news of her decision leaked out, Abbott attempted to disarm her critics by frankly admitting that as a result of her “indefensible” and “hypocritical” action she had ruined her own political reputation. But this was simply a continuation of the self-centred attitude that got her into this mess in the first place. Abbott’s personal reputation is hardly the issue. By her irresponsible action she has severely undermined the standing of socialists in the eyes of Labour Party supporters, who could be forgiven for concluding that, far from representing an alternative to New Labour, the left itself in practice espouses the same individualism and contempt for collective provision that lie at the heart of Blairism.

Though some members of Abbott’s constituency party immediately called for her resignation as MP, the left in Hackney North CLP was correct to reject this. The right wing have for years been itching to replace the off-message Abbott with some Blairite clone, but have been thwarted by the broad support she has enjoyed within the local party. It would have been a serious mistake for the left to allow its understandable revulsion at Abbott’s selfishness and political stupidity to play into the hands of the Labour right. Instead, Hackney North CLP passed a very moderately-worded resolution that “deeply regretted” Abbott’s decision, on the grounds that it undermined state education. What is less comprehensible, however, is that a section of the left actually voted *against* this resolution. We can only assume that, in their narrow focus on political tactics, they too have lost sight of political principles.

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