

Britain's Socialist Workers Party and the defence of national reformism—Part 2

A review of Alex Callinicos's *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*

Chris Marsden
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An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto by Alex Callinicos, Polity Press, London, 2003, ISBN 0-7456-2904-0

This is the second of a three-part review

Callinicos's "anti-capitalist movement"

Callinicos begins his book by explaining: "I drafted the final plan for the book in the departure lounge of Porto Alegre airport after the second World Social Forum, and wrote it in the midst of the preparations for the first European Social Forum in Florence."

It is to those grouped around the European and World Social Forums that he speaks. He knows full well that none of them are political novices or virgin formations. They all have long histories within various social democratic, Stalinist and/or radical groups. But he addresses them as if they were and by insisting that the ideas they advance don't matter. What matters is "the movement", which he states is given various names—the anti-globalisation movement, the alternative globalisation movement, the alternative world movement, and so on.

He insists, "In my view the movement is best described as anti-capitalist."

This is the first big lie on which Callinicos's book is based.

He insists that any and all of the many social and political protests that have developed since the 40,000-strong demonstration against the World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle in 1999 are a unified movement in opposition to capitalism. He does this by making capitalism as a system synonymous with the type of neo-liberal free market orthodoxy that has developed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the renunciation of old-style reformism by Tony Blair's New Labour Party and other social democratic organisations.

This enables him to portray anyone that advocates any check whatsoever on the activities of global markets and transnational corporations as "anti-capitalist". Fundamentally for his own political purposes, it means that he can equate all the protests and social movements that have developed since 1999 with the very political tendencies whose function is to prevent them developing in a consciously anti-capitalist and socialist direction.

Hence his review of events, which begins with the Seattle protest in 1999 and ends in 2002 with what he calls the development of "a new left" around the French monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique* "and the movement against international financial speculation ATTAC" (page 9). He portrays this as the initial stage in a process leading to the vote in the first round of the 2002 French presidential elections, where two radical groups that

claim to be Trotskyist (Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire and Lutte Ouvriere) secured 10 percent of the vote, the emergence of Jose Bove as an international "symbol of resistance" to genetically modified crops and the international expansion of ATTAC and its key role in the World Social Forum.

Callinicos even insists, "One reason why we can talk about a global movement is that it has found ideological articulation in a body of critical writing produced by a variety of intellectuals." (page 9)

He lists almost anyone who has made any, at best confused, critique of "neo-liberal capitalism"—Pierre Bourdieu, Noam Chomsky, Michael Albert, Walden Bello, Susan George, Toni Negri, Naomi Klein and Michael Hardt. Of these figures and the "movement" they head, he asserts that they are "resuming in both theory and practice" Marx's critique of capitalism, "even if most of its participants would reject the label 'Marxist'." (page 20)

His desperate efforts to portray figures who often profess their open opposition to socialism as "anti-capitalist"—and even unconsciously Marxist—are truly shameful.

He says there are various forms of "anti-capitalism" and lists them:

Reactionary anti-capitalism—essentially of a right-wing economic protectionist and even fascist character.

"Localist anti-capitalism"—various Greens and advocates of fair trade.

Then "bourgeois anti-capitalism"—of which he writes, "This might seem like a null category. Indeed the expression is a contradiction in terms."

However, Callinicos comes to the rescue of this *null* category, simply by asserting, "But ideologies do not obey the law of non-contradiction." (page 70)

He then quotes one of these bourgeois anti-capitalists, Noreena Hertz, who at least writes with a degree of honesty from which Callinicos himself does not suffer: "My argument is not intended to be anti-capitalist. Capitalism is clearly the best system for generating wealth and free trade and open markets have brought unprecedented growth to most, if not all of the world."

According to Callinicos, Hertz and her kind can still be called part of an anti-capitalist movement because she wants more power for national governments to regulate international markets—which fulfils his own national reformist criteria.

Another one of his headings is "reformist anti-capitalism", by which he means ATTAC. But he again manages to quote one representative of ATTAC, Susan George, who refutes his own contention of an anti-capitalist orientation in this organisation.

She writes: "I regret that I no longer know what overthrowing capitalism means at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Perhaps we are going to witness what the philosopher Paul Virilio has called 'the global accident'. If it happens it will most certainly be accompanied by

immense human suffering. If all the financial markets and all the stock exchanges collapsed at the same time, millions of people would find themselves back on the dole, bank failures would massively exceed the capacity of governments to prevent catastrophes, insecurity and crime would become the norm and we would be plunged into the Hobbesian hell of all against all. Call me a 'reformist' if you like, but I don't want such a future any more than the neo-liberal future." (pages 79-80)

Another of Callinicos's anti-capitalist currents is "autonomist anti-capitalism"—a mishmash of anarchist and protest groups associated with the views of Negri and Klein. He cites the darling of these layers as being the Zapatista peasant land reform movement in Mexico, before quoting its leader, Subcomandante Marcos, whose anti-capitalist war cry is as follows:

"Perhaps, for example, the new political morality will be constructed in a new space that will not require the taking or retention of power, but the counterweight and opposition that obliges the power to 'rule by obeying'." (page 81)

Later he quotes, "The Zapatistas believe that in Mexico recovery and defence of national sovereignty is part of the anti-liberal revolution... it is necessary to defend the state in the face of globalisation." (page 82)

This is a pretty damning picture Callinicos has painted. According to him, you can have a movement that is anti-capitalist—insofar as it believes that capitalism is the best way of organising the world and its resources and sets as its primary goal the defence of the nation state!

The final section of Callinicos's anti-capitalist movement is defined as socialist anti-capitalism. This consists of the Socialist Workers Party and its affiliates, and the French Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR) and other sections of the Pabloite United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

The LCR is praised because it did not respond in what Callinicos contemptuously refers to as a "dogmatic and sectarian fashion" to "the emergence of the anti-capitalist movement". By this he means the LCR's readiness, along with the SWP, to uncritically endorse anti-socialist tendencies. The LCR, for example, "performed an important role in ATTAC from the start" and others within the United Secretariat "have been heavily involved in the World Social Forums."

Even here, Callinicos shows his readiness to defer to a section of the old Stalinist bureaucracy. He insists that in Italy, "a socialist version of anti-capitalism has been taken up by a much more substantial organisation—the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC)", which he hails for avoiding a "decline into a Stalinist rump, and maintaining itself as a mass party with parliamentary representation and a substantial trade union following." (pages 84-85)

Callinicos naturally says nothing about the reformist and nationalist programme and political record of the PRC—how it has used its "parliamentary representation" and "substantial trade union following" to prop up Centre Left governments that have implemented sustained attacks on the Italian working class, and how it is playing a leading role internationally in an attempt to rehabilitate the old Stalinist parties.

The PRC has earned the loyalty of the SWP and a number of left groups claiming to be Trotskyist by opening its doors to them. Livio Maitan, an Italian co-thinker of the LCR, has sat on the PRC's central committee for years and acts as an adviser to its leader Fausto Bertinotti. This allows the radical groups to hold up the PRC as proof that supposedly left sections of the old labour bureaucracy can still provide a political alternative to the right wing.

In reality Rifondazione has acted for more than a decade as the main political prop of the Italian social democrats. There were numerous occasions in the 1990s when the centre-left "Olive Tree" coalition government survived due to the parliamentary support of the PRC. And it was the Olive Tree's attacks on the working class, imposed with the PRC's connivance, which paved the way for the victory of Silvio

Berlusconi's right-wing Forza Italia.

For Callinicos, however, the PRC are the big fish in the pond, who have a natural right to leadership and which the SWP can only hope to emulate in securing similar status within the political establishment.

A wing of bourgeois politics

Callinicos's second great lie involves his attempts to conceal the actual relationship between the World and European Social Forums and its constituent formations and the ruling class and its institutions.

He speaks of the twin response of the bourgeoisie to "major challenges from below" as being either repression or cooption—that is, weakening them "by making limited concessions designed to divide the movement, in particular by winning over the more moderate elements and isolating the radicals." (page 86)

He then goes on to speak of efforts by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank "to develop discussions with their critics", of the receptiveness to this dialogue of "the more respectable NGO's" and their reliance on Western governments and the state, and particular efforts by the French and German governments to adopt certain of the movement's demands in an effort to "pull its teeth".

In general, however, these warnings are muted. With regard to the efforts made by the IMF and World Bank to start a dialogue, Callinicos claims that this "simply fed the movement's sense that their opponents are morally and intellectually bankrupt." (page 87)

Callinicos knows full well that far from spurning such overtures, most of the leaders of "the movement" he seeks to glorify have been bought and paid for—and that "moral" and "intellectual" bankruptcy does not count for much when he who pays the piper can still call the tune.

The World Social Forum is largely the child of a union between the Brazilian Workers Party of Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva and ATTAC—initiated in 2000 supposedly as an alternative to the World Economic Forum.

Having utilised anti-imperialist and socialist demagoguery to come to power, Lula's recently elected government has earned the praise of the IMF and World Bank for its efforts to repay over \$260 billion in debt and implement austerity measures against the Brazilian working class.

In 2003, Anne Krueger, the IMF's first deputy managing director, praised the economic policies of the Lula administration and how it "is managing expectations very well and has a responsible approach to the problems."

ATTAC is a semi-official think-tank of the French Socialist Party, grouped around the journal *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Its only claim to a radical agenda is a call to implement a "Tobin tax" on capital transactions, in order to fund social programmes and strengthen the ability of national government to regulate economic life.

In a well researched article, "Who Controls the European Social Forum?", Paul Treanor notes that the sponsors of the World Social Forum—direct and indirect—include major bourgeois institutions such as the European Commission and the United Nations, as well as the Ford Foundation, Droits et Démocratie (a foundation run by the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, associated with the German Green Party, ICCO, (an inter-church organisation funded by the Netherlands government and the European Union), *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Oxfam, bodies run by the Canadian, Danish, German, Italian, Norwegian and Swedish governments, the Group of 77 undeveloped countries, the International Labour Organisation, the Council of Europe, and many others.

The 2002 European Social Forum was largely sponsored by the two

wings of Italian Stalinism, the Democratic Left and the PRC, to the tune of hundreds of thousands of euros.

The Third World Social Forum was dominated by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India—the Maoist and the formerly pro-Russian parties. It directly raised over \$2.5 million and was attended by the general secretary of that hotbed of CIA activity, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

“Project World Social Forum 2004” estimates total expenditure for the event in India at \$29.7 million, the bulk of which, \$26.2 million, is accounted for by the cost of the delegates’ participation and mostly comes from NGOs.

The term non-governmental organisation (NGO) is a convenient misnomer in that it conceals the role of many of these organisations as political instruments of the governments and major corporations on whom they rely for funding.

Basing himself on a World Bank document, “Report on Development: 2000-2001”, Treanor states that in that year “more than 70 percent of projects approved by the World Bank in 1999 included the participation of NGOs and representatives of ‘civil society’.” He continues, “a single project aimed at bolstering NGOs over seven countries cost \$900 million. The Bank assigned two of its functionaries to relations with NGOs and representatives of ‘civil society’; that figure has grown to 80 today.”

Another report cited by Treanor notes that governmental support for NGOs from advanced industrial countries other than the US stood at \$2.3 billion in 1995 and including the US, the figure would be much larger. He comments “As one writer puts it, ‘These gigantic sums reveal the hoax of presenting the rapid growth of NGOs as a ‘social phenomenon’.”

This is a hoax that Callinicos is also keen to perpetrate. It should be noted that it is estimated that 60 percent of WSF funding last year came from NGOs.

To underline the character of the World and European Social Forums as political agencies of the bourgeoisie, it should be added that last year’s European Social Forum held in Paris in November was provided with free facilities by the city administration and former Socialist Party economics minister and possible candidate for the 2007 presidential elections, Laurent Fabius, who breakfasted with José Bové, the farmers’ leader, on its opening day.

The event was even sponsored by France’s Gaullist President Jacques Chirac, who made 500,000 euros available to fund the ESF. He also sent his special envoy, Jérôme Bonnafont, to follow the proceedings.

This year the European Social Forum is to be held in London and the SWP is playing the leading role in organising it. This consists largely in seeking out the necessary millions in funding, by appealing to London Mayor Ken Livingstone, who recently returned to the Labour Party and has become a favourite of the City financiers, and from the Trades Union Congress.

To be continued

Notes:

[1]<http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/esf.html>



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact