

From the Ashes of the Old World, a Better World's in Birth

by Andrea Bauer

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Introduction

Arise, ye prisoners of starvation,
Arise, ye wretched of the earth,
For justice thunders condemnation —
A better world's in birth.

—“The International” (1871)

By harking back in her title to the revolutionary anthem, “The International,” author Andrea Bauer expresses both the defiant optimism and the political heritage put forward in these pages. The form her writing takes is itself a time-honored socialist tradition: a Political Resolution, a product of the collective thinking and decision-making of a radical party, in this case, the socialist feminist Freedom Socialist Party (FSP).

Democratic, collective processes are in short supply today, even in community coalitions and on the Left. Too often, top-down dictates or unending attempts to reach consensus take the place of rigorous discussion and informed approval by the majority. Thus a brief description of how and why this document was created may help readers better understand and make use of it.

When it is time for the Freedom Socialist Party to hold a convention, a major preliminary step is for the National Committee, an elected, representative leadership body, to assess world and national developments and their meaning for this Leninist, Trotskyist party. The National Committee meeting held in San Francisco in November 1998 began the thinking process that resulted in this pamphlet.

Andrea Bauer, the Managing Editor of the *Freedom Socialist* newspaper, was assigned to write up the meet-

ing's conclusions in the form of a resolution to present to the membership. Bauer was well-equipped for the task both as a writer and a political thinker, a student and teacher of Karl Marx's *Capital*, and a member of the day-to-day national leadership team of the party.

This team closely reviewed initial drafts of the resolution. The paper was then distributed to every party member during the three-month period of discussion and writing which precedes every national convention. Changes, criticisms and points of agreement were brought forward through deliberations in all branches as well as written responses that were published in Pre-Convention Discussion Bulletins.

Next, the resolution was presented to the entire membership at the September 1999 convention. Australian and Canadian sympathizing sections added their analysis of how the resolution applied to conditions in their countries. Proposals were made from the floor for additions, clarification, and expansion on various points. After a full and open exchange, the ranks of the U.S. party voted to approve the amended resolution and the tasks outlined in it. Bauer incorporated the membership's revisions into a final version which was first issued publicly in the *Freedom Socialist* newspaper (Vol. 21, #1, April-June 2000) and is now presented in this publication.

The painstaking process described above produces the best view of ever-changing realities because it incorporates the insights and life experiences of trade unionists, activists of color, students, retirees, feminists, gay liberationists, and seasoned organizers from a broad range of political arenas spanning the U.S. and many parts of the world.

After adoption, a Political Resolution still must be evaluated frequently to see if its predictions are being borne out or contradicted by subsequent events. In the

case of *this* resolution, the discussion was no sooner ended than Bauer's anticipations were confirmed: in November 1999, her diagnosis of a ruling class in crisis coupled with a radical shift among youth was made evident to all by the mass protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organization. The new burst of activism foreseen in the resolution was confirmed a hundred-fold—in the bastion of Microsoft and Starbucks no less!

But the Pacific Northwest is also the home of the Freedom Socialist Party and its sister organization, Radical Women, both founded in Seattle in the 1960s and now with branches across the U.S. and beyond. Three decades of socialist feminist education on the need for multi-issue solidarity undoubtedly helped forge the global links between labor, environmentalists, youth, queers, feminists and people of color that were so evident during that week of inspiration and tear gas.

The "ashes of the old century" were truly seen in the brutal police crackdown and the fear and paralysis of Seattle's ruling elite during the protests. But just as powerfully, the mass denunciation of global corporate rule expressed a passionate desire for a better world. Internationalism bloomed — and with it a new sense by many in the U.S. of their responsibility to take on the multinationals that drain the entire world's resources.

Ultimately, the new wave of militants will come face to face with the question of whether their goals can be achieved through "kinder, gentler" capitalism or international socialism. This pamphlet provides a clear and persuasive argument for the revolutionary solution.

Part 1

Overview

As the 20th century closes, humanity is divided by civil and imperialist wars, by extremes of wealth and poverty, by sex and sexuality, by race, by ethnicity, and by nationality. In many haunting ways, the years at the end of the century look all too much like those at its beginning, as the gap between rich and poor widens across the globe and the majority of the world's people are stalked by hunger, violence, plague, disaster, and want.

But there are fundamental differences, and these are critical to understanding how great are the opportunities, not just the dangers, that face the working class today. In 1900, the wealth, influence, and confidence of the capitalist class were expanding. Today, the ruling class is fast losing its illusions about its ability to manage the chaotic and perilous world it has created. Many of its leading lights enter the new millennium with dread.

The owning elites are treading on minefields. The economic catastrophe that began in 1997 affected first Asia, then Russia, and then Latin America. It did more than merely expose the failure of the neoliberal strategy — the combination of completely globalized “free trade” and privatization — to solve capitalism's basic problems. It also demonstrated how neoliberalism has brought these problems to an unparalleled acuteness, shoving the capitalist system onto a fast track toward world economic collapse or world war.

In short, we have arrived at the pervasive economic crisis foretold and analyzed in depth in the Political

Resolution adopted at the 1988 FSP convention.

And the ruling class is experiencing not only an economic crisis, but also a collapse of confidence. This became obvious following the currency, stock market and banking meltdowns that started in 1997, as articles in mainstream magazines featured headlines such as “R.I.P. for Global Capitalism?” Since then, nothing has really changed, although the expressions of anxiety have become more muted.

The dilemma of the imperialists remains insoluble: the unlimited expansion of growth and profits they need is impossible in a world where markets are choked, with workers more and more pauperized and unable to purchase the products they create.

Increasingly, capitalism’s analysts, politicians, and grand managers are admitting that they are up the creek without a paddle. Policy paralysis has set in on many fronts; the problem of what to do about the quagmire in Russia is a stark example. The faults of neoliberalism are being probed and its wisdom challenged, but there is no consensus emerging on a more successful capitalist course of action — for the simple reason that none exists.

This gives the working class an unparalleled opening to make the 21st century something profoundly different, and better, than the 20th.

New potential in today’s working class

While modern capitalists are considerably more demoralized than their counterparts a century ago, today’s workers are vastly more skilled, educated, knowledgeable, internationally connected, and integrated. Women, people of color, immigrants, and lesbians and gays, who hold the keys to uniting a working class set against itself by sexism, racism, and national chauvinism, are now a much more entrenched, organized, and assertive part of

the workforce.

Workers showed their mettle in an upsurge against globalization and its effects that began in early 1994, starting in Chiapas, Mexico and rolling powerfully through Europe, Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere. However, as we wrote in our last Political Resolution in 1997, that wave of protest was diffused by the timid, compromising posture of labor misleaders.

But the 1997 economic crisis set off a fierce new round of resistance in Asia, Russia, and Brazil. Tens of thousands of people protested job cuts in South Korea and price hikes in the Philippines. And all-out mobilizations against International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures led to the resignation of the prime minister in Thailand and helped bring down Dictator-for-Life Suharto in Indonesia.

Although the pitch of labor organizing in Europe and the U.S. is not as dramatic as it was a few years ago, workers all around the world continue to struggle intently against the concerted attack on their standards of living and their rights. The bold wharfies of the Maritime Union of Australia, who attracted international support for their stand against unionbusting by the bosses and government in 1998, are a valiant example.

Reform vs. revolution

For their battles to bear fruit, however, the globe’s heroic workers must come to realize that *the era of lasting reforms is over. The only answer to the forced march backward demanded by the international capitalist class is revolution: eliminating that class and the system that supports it.*

The top mis-guiders of the working class in each country — union bureaucrats, social-democratic politicians, movement careerists — are tied by chains of privilege and fear to “their own” ruling classes. They will do

The inevitable economic crisis

everything they can to keep workers from seeing the logic of revolution.

For that reason, the efforts of the FSP are crucial. The crisis is clear and present, and so is the anger of millions of workers and oppressed people who suffer its miseries. The moment has never been more opportune for the party that is ready not only to “tell truth to power,” in the current catch phrase, but also to those *not* in power — to tell working people forthrightly that the only way forward is the fight for socialism.

If the times are ready for the FSP, the FSP is also ready for the times. We are armed with the socialist feminist program that is essential for workingclass unity and a remarkable record of achievement that spans more than 30 years and all sorts of political weather.

The current world crisis heralded in July 1997 by the sudden fall in value of Thailand’s currency, the baht, is a result of neoliberalism: a strategy of “breaking down trade barriers to allow international finance capital easy access everywhere.” (Megan Cornish, *Freedom Socialist*, Vol. 19, #1) The story of the crisis is a dramatic tale of capitalism, the virus whose contagion has spread throughout a very much connected and disgusted world.

Neoliberalism is merely today’s face of imperialism. It is the evolution of policies engineered at the Bretton Woods international conference of 1944, primarily by the U.S. These policies, in turn, simply reflected the logical development of capitalism as described by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, an analysis carried forward by V.I. Lenin in *Imperialism — The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

The capitalist dream of infinite expansion

Fueled by rearmament for World War II, U.S. production kicked into overdrive in 1938, finally pulling the country out of depression. The urgent problem for capitalists at the end of the war was how to keep the expansion growing, how to invest their huge amounts of capital profitably.

At the economic conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, the world powers settled on a solution: an attack on protectionist and isolationist policies and the