

## Editorial

### The Significance of the Quebec Election

The results of the March 26 provincial election in Quebec are being hailed as a victory for federalism in general and for Stephen Harper in particular. The election ended in the first minority government in Quebec in 130 years, as each of the three mainstream parties – the Liberals, the Parti Quebecois (PQ) and the Action Democratique du Quebec (ADQ) – received just under a third of the votes. The Liberals took 48 seats (down from 76 in the 2003 election) and the PQ dropped to 36 seats (down from 45 in the last election), while the ADQ emerged as the official opposition with 41 seats (up from 5 in the last election). Quebec Solidaire (QS) and the Quebec Green Party each received just under four percent of the total votes cast.

In fact, the Quebec election result has little to do with the issue of sovereignty, which has really not been on the agenda in Quebec since the defeat of the

1995 referendum. Rather, it is an indication that the political disequilibrium gripping Canadian federal politics has now emerged in Quebec provincial politics. This, in turn, is a reflection of the growing divisions within the capitalist ruling class and the marginalization and isolation of the working class movement within Canadian and Quebec politics.

While all three mainstream Quebec parties have embraced the policies of neo-liberalism since at least the early 1990s, they have somewhat different approaches to implementing those policies based on the constituencies they draw their support from and the specific monopoly capitalist interests that they represent. The ADQ favours the “shock therapy” approach of former Ontario premier Mike Harris, while the PQ wants to provide neo-liberalism with a “human face” *a la* Tony Blair and others. For its part,

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## Film Review

### When the Past Lives in the Present: *Amu* Screened in Winnipeg

Following its Canadian premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in the fall of 2005, *Amu*, by filmmaker Shonali Bose, opened in Winnipeg on March 30 as part of its limited cross-Canada release. Set both in present day India and during the 1984 Delhi massacre and riots which followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi, *Amu* tells the terrible story of the crimes committed by the Indian state against its own citizens through a young woman’s journey of discovery.

Kaju (Konkana Sensharma) is an Indian-American, struggling with the same issues of identity and belonging with which many first generation youth grapple with. Visiting her family in India after

graduating from UCLA, she feels both like she has come home and like she is an outsider. She meets college student Kabir (Ankur Khanna) who ridicules her attempts to discover the “real India” and to be a part of life in India, yet who, as the activist son of an upper-class family, is also grappling with identity and his role in India. Kabir joins Kaju on her journey through the vibrant, bursting streets of Delhi. He is also with her as she ventures into Delhi’s slums, where she is gripped with an overwhelming sense of *deja-vu*.

When her adoptive mother Keya (Brinda Karat) arrives in Delhi, she is horrified to hear that Kaju has

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the Quebec Liberal Party, like its federal counterpart, wants to present itself as the voice of moderation while aggressively pushing the neo-liberal agenda.

While, on the surface, the fact that all the seats were won by neo-liberal parties would tend to indicate an overwhelming victory for neo-liberalism, the deep divisions within the neo-liberal camp portends a growing crisis in those policies.

Historically, the success of the PQ hinged on its ability to link sovereignty with social democracy and to champion the interests of the state monopoly capitalist sector, especially Hydro-Quebec. This was in no small part due to the consistent failure of the CCF/NDP to take a principled stand in support of sovereignty for the Quebec people, which resulted in a niche that the PQ could occupy. However, the global collapse of social democratic economic policies during the 1980s left the PQ adrift. In order to convince the Quebec bourgeoisie that it could be relied upon to govern Quebec in the interests of the monopoly capitalists, during the 1990s the PQ was forced to pledge its loyalty to the new global policies of neo-liberalism. This created serious problems for the PQ because neo-liberalism is incompatible with sovereignty. As a result, a rift developed between the PQ and the trade unions in Quebec, while the youth abandoned the party in droves. The Quebec Solidaire, a coalition of several leftist parties and social action groups, and the Green Party have both succeeded to some extent in attracting those disaffected by the PQ's shift to neo-liberalism.

The Liberal Party has always represented the interests of big Anglo-American-Canadian capital in Quebec and its dramatic drop to minority government status means that the section of monopoly capital that it represents is facing difficulties in Quebec. The ADQ, while a relatively new political party, continues a very old political tradition in Quebec dating back to the early nineteenth century, the tradition of "blue" or conservative nationalism. The government of Duplessis and the Creditiste Party were also part of that tradition, as is a section of the Bloc Quebecois, which came out of the split in the Conservative Party following the collapse of the Meech Lake Accord and the rejection of the Charlottetown Accord. Rene Levesque was able to forge an alliance between the social democratic "left" and the conservative "right" within an overarching nationalist/sovereigntist movement, leading to the

demise of the Creditistes. A section of the conservative nationalists also joined the Quebec Liberal Party, particularly in the late 1990s when Jean Charest became leader of the Quebec Liberals. However, the pressures of neo-liberalism and the growing inter-monopoly contradictions that it engenders has shattered those former alliances and resulted in the re-emergence of a conservative-nationalist provincial party in the form of the ADQ. As has been the case since the time of the British conquest of Quebec and the uprisings of 1837, this section of the Quebec nationalist movement seeks to profit by the open sell-out of the Quebec nation to the foreign colonialists and imperialists. Despite Stephen Harper's proclamation that the success of the ADQ represents a "victory for federalism", one of the features of this section of the Quebec bourgeoisie has historically been an attempt to cut out the Bay Street middlemen and deal directly with foreign finance capital. Therefore, the rise of the ADQ represents the growth of tensions within the Canadian federation and not their reduction.

There are some who still cling to the illusion that the PQ is the "true" representative of the aspirations of the Quebec people for sovereignty and democracy, just as in the rest of the country there are those who cling to the illusion that the NDP (or the Liberals) can play that role. However, the fact is that none of the parties of the monopoly bourgeoisie is capable of representing the interests of the people of Quebec. The significance of the Quebec elections cannot be determined by looking at the results of any of the mainstream neo-liberal parties. The real significance of these elections is that they have exposed the underlying weaknesses of the bourgeois political system, the inability of any section of the monopoly capitalist class to consolidate its grip on Quebec society and a new phase in the ongoing crisis of representative democracy. In other words, it presents an opportunity for the working class movement and the political forces advocating an end to neo-liberalism and to capitalism, itself, to break out of the marginalization and isolation imposed on them for the past two decades. Those who advocate an alliance with the PQ are seeking to block the working class from taking an independent path and condemn it forever to being the tail of the "progressive" section of the monopoly capitalist class.

## For Your Information

# The Stench of Occupation

The situation of the people of Gaza continues to deteriorate steadily under continued Israeli occupation. While Israeli settlements within Gaza were removed in August 2005, Israeli military occupation has intensified, with the complete closure of Gaza to all external aid, food and visits in place for several months.

Earlier this month, five people were killed and dozens more seriously harmed when a sewage treatment plant in Beit Lahia in northern Gaza collapsed and 20,000 cubic metres of raw sewage flooded into the nearby Bedouin village of Um Al Nasser. Over sixty homes were completely destroyed in the collapse, with hundreds of others damaged. Following the collapse, the Palestinian Ministry of Health declared a state of emergency and warned that the sewage flood may result in long-term health complications for thousands living in the vicinity.

The Israeli government and its apologists have tried to use this catastrophe as proof that Palestinians are somehow incapable of self-government. The reality is the Palestinian Authority (PA) had identified several years ago that there were a number of sewage treatment centres in need of urgent attention in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. They had raised funds from the World Bank, European Commission, Sweden and other international donors specifically for upgrading faulty sewage treatment plants. However, according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, this urgent infrastructure project has been put on hold "... for more than two years due to delays in importing pipes and pumps from abroad as a result of the closure imposed by IOF [Israeli Occupation Forces] on the Gaza Strip." The Centre also noted that even as work on the project got underway, "IOF military operations in the area prevented workers from free and safe access to the area to conduct their work."

The head of the Palestinian environment ministry, Yousef Abu Safiya, told reporters that there are another 40 sewage cesspools in the Gaza Strip which desperately need renovation as they are also at risk of collapse.

Yet despite the Um Al Nasser disaster, the aid boycott against the PA remains intact. Since the election of Hamas in January 2006, the PA's two

largest western donors – the U.S. and EU – have withheld all aid, as has Canada, which was actually the first western country to suspend aid to occupied Palestine. The consequences of this boycott have been devastating for all Palestinians.

Since April 2006 the economic crisis has been exacerbated by the refusal of the Israeli government to transfer the tax and customs revenues it collects in the occupied territories to the PA, despite its obligation to do so under international agreements.

A report released by the UK-based NGO Oxfam International on April 13 outlines the economic impact of the aid boycott and Israel's illegal transfer freeze.

Oxfam commissioned a survey, carried out by the Palestinian Centre for Public Opinion, which found that 80 per cent of Palestinian families have seen their income drop during the past year, with just fewer than 50 per cent of all the families surveyed saying they had lost more than half of their income. (A report released by the United Nations in early 2007 found poverty amongst Palestinians living under occupation increased by 30 per cent in 2006, with the hardest hit area being Gaza, where an estimated 80 per cent of people live below the poverty line).

Besides interviewing Palestinian families, the Centre also interviewed senior public officials responsible for running schools, hospitals and water surveys in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Ninety per cent said services had been negatively impacted by the aid boycott. Fifty per cent of the public officials interviewed reported they had slashed the provision of essential services to Palestinians by more than half due to lack of funds.

Based on the surveys, Oxfam concluded that Palestinians have suffered significant damage from the withdrawal of aid. According to Oxfam's Executive Director Jeremy Hobbs, "international aid should be provided impartially on the basis of need, not as a political tool to change the policies of a government. ... And in this case, it hasn't worked. Instead, parents have been driven into debt, children taken out of classrooms and whole families deprived of access to medicine and healthcare."

### *Amu...from page 1*

been visiting the slums and tells her not to return, but Kaju cannot stay away. Gradually, through Kaju's flashbacks to her early youth, she realizes that something terrible happened and that she was a witness to it all. Working with Kabir, she pieces together the events of November 1984, including the massacre of over 5,000 Sikhs and the riots that took place, organized by the highest levels of the state with the full cooperation of the police and bureaucrats.

The flashback scenes to the massacres and riots are powerful - not because Bose uses gratuitous violence to convey the terror but because she takes the opposite approach and instead, while using light and sound to represent the mayhem, leaves its specificity to the imagination of the viewer. Not only does Bose convey the terror and chaos, she also depicts the bravery of the ordinary people who refused to be complicit in the massacres and helped hide Sikhs.

Through their research, Kabir's father emerges as one of the forces behind the 1984 crimes. Interestingly, though, as a filmmaker Bose rejects the convenience of creating a "bad guy" on whom the atrocities can be pinned. It is not Kabir's father - it is the entire Indian state, rotten to its core, which bears responsibility for the crimes of 1984. In one scene, Kabir and Kaju meet with a group of

widows whose families were killed during the massacres. One of the widows tells Kaju that the riots were organized by a government Minister. They were all involved, says another in the group, the police, the politicians, the bureaucrats - all of them. The Indian censor board, which delayed the Indian release of *Amu* by three months, ordered these two lines of dialogue be dubbed over (Bose refused and instead the dialogue was removed from the version released in India, with only the women's lips moving). Even with the edit, the film was given the equivalent of an NC-17 rating, which meant that youth couldn't attend the film officially, although it has ended up being very popular with Indian youth. A censorship board official justified *Amu's* rating by stating "Why should young people know a history which is best buried and forgotten?"

But of course history can neither be buried nor forgotten. As Kaju faces the terrible reality of her past, Bose is able to depict both the horror of 1984 and the continuing tragedy of the failure to hold the state accountable for its crimes. In one of the final scenes of the movie, in present day India, the news is on in the background, reporting on the latest state-organized massacre in Gujarat. The failure to punish anyone for 1984, Bose is telling her audience, has only led to more tragedies.

## United May Day Banquet 2007

Friday, May 4  
Kum Koon Garden  
257 King St.  
Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

Dinner will be followed by a  
cultural program and dance.

Tickets: \$25.00

## Modern Communism

Bulletin of the Manitoba Regional Committee  
of the Communist Party of Canada  
(Marxist-Leninist)  
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