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Thirty Years Since the Fall of the Berlin Wall

The Demand of the Peoples to Exercise
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November 9 marked the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was one of a series of events in 1989 that seized the imagination of the entire world. First came the agreement in Poland that year between the government and the anti-communist workers' organization called Solidarność. Then in November, the Berlin Wall was torn down and in December, Nicolae

Ceaușescu and his wife were brutally executed in Romania. Within two years the Soviet Union had collapsed, changing the map of the world.



Berlin, the day after the fall of Berlin Wall, November 9, 1989.

In 1990, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the U.S. and Canada adopted the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (Paris Charter) which declared the shared values of the only kind of democracy they would accept in changed circumstances.

Henceforth, any country which did not adopt a market economy, a multiparty system and the U.S. imperialist definition of human rights was to be targeted for "regime change." On this basis, the counterrevolutionary forces established political systems in which the triumphant capitalists placed both "radicals" and "conservatives" in government while the anti-worker, anti-people policy remained the same. So-called colour revolutions were organized along with military aggression when this did not succeed in bringing about the changes the forces promoting the counterrevolutions demanded.

Euphoria, euphoria and more euphoria was the order of the day 30 years ago for the bourgeoisie. Everything would be set right. A massive campaign against communism was launched on an unprecedented scale.



Demonstration in Ottawa against U.S.-led NATO war against Yugoslavia, April 17, 1999.

But the euphoria that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall soon evaporated as the working class in the countries of both eastern and western Europe, and the entire world, could see that the changes which took place did not favour the working people.

Within a matter of five years, the result was war in Bosnia, the Russian invasion of Chechnya, Georgia's claims on Abkhazia, Armenians and Azeris fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, and massive unemployment and the accumulation of poverty on one pole and the accumulation of riches on the other.

During these 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the so-called liberation of eastern Europe and the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the retreat of revolution has permitted the rampage of the neo-liberal anti-social offensive. The U.S. striving for world domination has expanded the membership of the U.S.-led NATO military alliance, as well as its reach, beyond the borders of the North Atlantic. With the help of its NATO allies, the U.S. has launched multiple wars of aggression and occupation, causing hundreds and thousands of deaths and destruction. Under the pretext of war on terrorism, regime change, destruction and rule by exception are presented as the "new normal."

In all the allegedly democratic countries where the rule of the international financial oligarchy prevails, the working people are subjected to the worst treatment by the monopolies and oligopolies and the governments they have taken over. This onslaught against the working class, against the communist and workers' movement, against the broad masses of people of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, is facilitated by the disinforming role of the state and its agencies and all those who seek to hold on to positions of power and privilege within the capitalist world order.

Today, the international financial oligarchy has usurped the powers of national states to impose supranational narrow private interests. It rules through cartels and coalitions disguised as governments. The more they usurp power and try to establish their hegemony over their rivals while keeping the people in check, the more they rule by exception in the name of national security and the national interest, while the more vain become their attempts to manipulate elections to stave off the civil wars raging within the own ranks, and the more obvious that their rule is superfluous. Modern institutions are required which realize the striving of the people to humanize the natural and social environment and to make sure peace prevails.

Thirty years ago, the bourgeoisie, imperialism and world reaction manipulated the broad discontent with pseudo-socialism of the peoples in the former Soviet Union and the people's democracies of eastern Europe to install the capitalist system. Today, the discontent of the masses of people everywhere with the neo-liberal capitalist world order is such that the bourgeoisie, imperialism and world reaction are once again doing their utmost to manipulate this discontent to rescue their bankrupt liberal democratic institutions and stave off the consequences of the anarchy that exists, which they cannot control.

Once again media reporting on the significance of the fall of the Berlin Wall is intent on drowning out any discussion of the real problems which require real solutions. The need for democratic renewal is forgotten in a false debate that juxtaposes the dogmatic rendering of communism and socialism and the dogmatic rendering of



capitalism. All of it merely emphasizes the absurdity and superficiality of the bourgeoisie's discourse. It brings to the fore their arrogant disconnect with the real problems that required solutions 30 years ago and still need to be addressed today, more urgently than ever. It cannot be otherwise because what is being celebrated is the usurpation of the movement of the workers and peoples to exercise control over their lives in the name of "freedom" and "democracy."

The promise of "freedom" has turned into the wars of occupation and aggression carried out by the U.S. imperialists and their NATO allies along with other big powers. It takes the form of murderous sanctions, the caging of children, violence against women and families, the brutal murders of Indigenous peoples as we see in Bolivia, trafficking in human beings as cheap labour, and a new world order where prerogative powers are used to impose arrangements that do not have the consent of the peoples. National interest and national security are cited to justify plunder, stepped up exploitation and criminalization. Rational political discourse which unifies the polity and opens a path to progress is absent because political parties have become a cartel party system without members, legislatures are no longer vehicles which are seen to express national sovereignty, and bodies politic are destroyed in the name of high ideals. The upshot is anarchy and violence and the further marginalization of the people from the decision-making process.



The only success stories people are told are those of a tiny handful of billionaires, which in fact serves to underscore the trend of the rich getting richer and the poor poorer. People from the former East Germany openly say that the freedom they achieved is the "freedom to buy consumer goods" while their profound desire to exercise control over their lives is as remote as ever. The united Germany, in rivalry with France and Great Britain, has become a main contender with the U.S. for control over Europe, Africa and Asia.

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, all the euphoria about the fall of communism and the victory of capitalism has nothing to show for it. To divert attention from the state of the capitalist-imperialist world, the ruling elite, in addition to equating pseudo-socialism with communism, are targeting communist ideology as hate ideology that motivates violence. To stop people speaking their minds for fear of reprisals, the propaganda is still carried within the perspective of the Cold War that a "free market economy" and ideological and political pluralism are superior to communism. What is the reality on the world scale? What is such a reality telling us? What needs to be done to solve the serious problems which face societies and humankind?

The fact is that all over the world people are demanding change; a broad disaffection exists everywhere. What is the content of the democratic renewal, which is the fundamental demand of the peoples, and what form should it take?

The aim of the propaganda that communism has failed is to encourage those who say either that communism is all wrong or those who claim that the liberal democratic institutions can be made to function without corruption, and to get the people to side with one or the other. As is the case in all other spheres, a diversion is created between two false opposites.

Having gone through such a tumultuous period, the world has learned that the problems it faces are not a matter of a fight between dogmas. It is a matter of what is happening in this world itself. What is the stage of its development and what should be done about it?

Democratic renewal is the main content of this period. It surpasses all other considerations and is the banner which is bringing new forces onto the centre-stage of history. Millions upon millions of people have direct experience with their conditions of life and work and they perceive their reality not through the eyes of dogmas but by paying with their hides.

The diversionary discourse about the "victory of democracy" over "communism" was used to create euphoria 30 years ago, while today it is aimed at keeping the old forces and old content in power even though under today's conditions there is no place for these old forms and old content. Since 1989, governments called "radical," "conservative," "right-wing," "left-wing" and "centrist" have worked to sabotage democratic renewal and lead their people right into the arms of the world's greatest enemies.



The new period that was irresistibly ushered in by the changes which took place so rapidly 30 years ago showed that no force could continue to act in the old way. The conditions surpassed the necessity for old forms, which have passed away, while new forms have yet to be brought into being. The new conditions bring forth an agenda of their own, independent of anyone's will, in the form of the demand of the peoples to exercise control over their lives as peoples and as individuals and over their destiny as nations. It is the struggle for the right to be of individuals, collectives and entire societies and nations, including oppressed nation-states, which we see today. Since 1989 the consciousness of the peoples worldwide rejects the abandonment of individuals to fend for themselves, the marginalization of the peoples in decision-making and the suppression of the right of nations to self-determination.

It is the agenda for democratic renewal which has been put on the table of the world for solution. This is the demand of millions upon millions of people all over the world, in developing countries but also and notably in the so-called advanced economies which are mired in crisis and where the weight of the old arrangements is exhausting the people as never before.

To Humanize the Natural and Social Environment -- All Out for Democratic Renewal!

(Photos: TML, planete invite ecole)

134th Anniversary of the Hanging of Louis Riel

Infamous Day in the History of Canada

On November 16, 1885, the British colonial power executed the great Métis leader Louis Riel. Riel had been charged and found guilty of high treason after the Métis were defeated at the Battle of Batoche in May of that year. The execution of Louis Riel was intended as an assault on the consciousness of the Métis nation, but was unsuccessful in putting an end to their fight for their rights and dignity as a nation. The struggle of the Métis to affirm their right to be and exercise control over their political affairs continues to this day.

The two great uprisings of the Métis -- the Red River Uprising (1869-1870) and North-West Uprising (1885) -- were not isolated events but took place at a time when the Indigenous nations and the Quebec nation were also striving to affirm their nationhood, and at a time of revolutionary ferment in Europe. The Métis' uprisings represented a response to the colonial project that sought

to reproduce the British state in North America and block the legitimate aspirations of the nations that comprised Canada.



Métis leader Louis Riel (centre) surrounded by councillors of the Métis Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia.

The *British North America Act* of 1867 and the federal government's purchase of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869-1870, juxtaposed with the decline of the traditional Métis economy based on the buffalo hunt, forced the Métis to engage in a power struggle with the colonial authorities and negotiate Manitoba's entry into the Confederation after the establishment of a Legislative Assembly. The spirit that motivated Riel and the members of the provisional government at the time is contained in the Declaration of the Inhabitants of Rupert's Land and the Northwest that affirms the sovereignty of the Métis over their lands. The latter also refused to recognize the authority of Canada, "[...], which presumes to have the right to come and impose on us a form of government even more incompatible with our rights and our interests [...]."

The *Manitoba Act*, which established that province, was voted on and passed in the federal Parliament in May 1870. The government wasted no time in exerting control over its new territory as evidenced by the Wolseley military expedition later that year -- which led to Riel fleeing to the U.S. for fear of his safety -- the creation of the North-West Mounted Police (1873), and the *Indian Act* (1876). Prime Minister John A. Macdonald championed the colonization of the west and the development of agriculture with the national policy he had been promoting since 1878. With the help of the Oblates (lay members of the Catholic Church affiliated with a monastic community), the authorities sought to settle the Métis and force them to adopt an agricultural lifestyle. Facing an existence within this rigid framework and under pressure from land speculators, some Métis sold the land that had been granted to them and settled in Saskatchewan.

This was a period when nationalism was in the air. The events in Manitoba alerted Quebecers to the fragility of the Métis' situation, while the abolition of the teaching of French in New Brunswick in 1871 indicated the need for organization. National organizations to defend the rights and interests of Francophones, such as the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society, spread across the continent with the waves of migration from the St. Lawrence valley. The National Convention of Montreal in 1874 and the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations in Quebec in 1880 and Windsor in 1883 brought together delegations from all of French America in a strong show of the vitality of the "French-Canadian family." Acadians held their first convention in 1881 where they held a celebration and adopted a national doctrine.



Métis won a victory at the Battle of Fish Creek, April 24, 1885. Lithograph by Fred Curzon.

Métis leaders, under the sway of the Church at that time, did not rock the boat. In the aftermath of the Red River resistance, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste society of Manitoba was founded in Saint-Boniface, Manitoba. Its vice-president was none other than Louis Riel. This association included in its infancy as many French Canadians as Francophone Métis.

However, aware of their distinct identity, Métis leaders wished to forge their own nationalism. Riel would come to articulate a Métis nationalism, with its own holidays and national symbols. This process would culminate in the creation of the Métis National Council at Batoche in September 1884, to promote the development of their political consciousness.



Louis Riel's address to the jury in Regina courtroom, July 1885.

The Métis once again took up arms to affirm their nationhood and right to be in the North West Rebellion of 1885. For three days between May 9 and May 12, 1885, 250 Métis fought valiantly against 916 Canadian Forces at the Battle of Batoche but were defeated and Riel surrendered.

Macdonald and his cabinet took a hard line with respect to Riel and his compatriots. Riel was tried in Regina over five days in July 1885. After half-an-hour's deliberation he was found guilty of treason by the jury, which recommended mercy. Nevertheless, Judge Hugh Richardson sentenced him to death. From September 1885 to October 1886, Riel and several of his comrades, all Indigenous, would be condemned to hang.

While times have changed, the Canadian state has inherited the colonial power and it persists in the aim of negating the nationhood of the Métis, Indigenous nations and Quebec. The proud history of the Métis and their fight to affirm their rights and nationhood is not some historical artifact gathering dust, but continues to gleam brightly in the light of the present day. The fight to affirm rights that belong to people by virtue of their being human is precisely the fight for modern, human-centred arrangements. Louis Riel's life epitomized the fight for the recognition of rights on a modern basis.

Louis Riel's life is an important legacy that is as relevant as ever at this time when the Canadian state is doing its utmost to negate the rights of the Métis, Indigenous nations and the Quebec nation, as well as the workers, women, youth, national minorities and all the collectives in the society, all in the name of security, balance, austerity and other phony high ideals.

(Based on an article by Marc-André Gagnon published in Chantier politique no. 32, November 18, 2013. Translated from the original French by TML Weekly. Photos from public archives.)



Liberal Apologies for the Hanging of Louis Riel



Manitoba Métis Federation's annual commemoration of Louis Riel's at his grave site on the anniversary of his death, November 16, 2018. (Manitoba Métis Federation)

The 134th anniversary of the cowardly hanging of the great leader of the Métis people, Louis Riel in 1885 once again brings to mind the hypocrisy engrained in the minds of those who seek to

defend Canada's liberal democratic institutions under whose aegis crimes were committed in the past in the name of high ideals and national interest and continue to be committed today in the name of high ideals and the national interest. Just as in the 1870s and 1880s, the Métis nation was fighting for its sovereignty, which clashed with John A. Macdonald's vision of a Canada stretching from sea-to-sea-to-sea, so too today, the demands of the Canadian people and Indigenous nations clash with the Trudeau government's vision of Canada as the private property of supranational oligopolies, the U.S. imperialists and its NATO war-mongering military alliance. At the time of the Métis Rebellion, Manitoba served as the gateway to the settlement of the West and a hub of the transcontinental railway. The "founding fathers" created the North-West Mounted Police, later the RCMP, to suppress the nation led by Louis Riel, giving Manitoba the dubious honour of contributing to the establishment of the forces of "law and order" in Canada.

During the week of December 9-13, 1996, the federal parliament debated Bill C-297, a bill to revoke the conviction of Louis Riel, who was hanged for "treason" following the defeat of the 1885 North-West Rebellion. The private member's bill, introduced by MP Suzanne Tremblay (Bloc Québécois: Rimouski-Temiscouata) on October 21, 1996, was narrowly defeated. Tremblay had introduced a similar bill in November, 1994 but it too was defeated. In fact, the defeat in December 1996 was the seventh time since 1983 that such a bill had been introduced in Parliament and defeated.

When the bill was defeated for the seventh time, most Liberal MPs voted against it. Not a single Cabinet member voted for the bill and several prominent Liberal ministers were reported to have run up the stairs to avoid having their vote recorded. Among those voting against the bill were several Liberal MPs from Manitoba. One of them, John Harvard (Winnipeg-St. James), was asked why he had voted against the measure, despite almost universal support amongst Manitobans. He stated that he did so because the Bloc Québécois had a "hidden agenda" in introducing the bill and intended to use it to generate support for "separatism." He went on to claim that the Liberal government would be reintroducing a similar bill in the next session, one which would clearly identify Louis Riel as a "Father of Confederation" and a defender of Canadian unity.

TML Daily wrote at the time:

"Louis Riel was not a 'Father of Confederation.' Far from it, he spent most of his life opposing the Confederation and the attempts of the Anglo-Canadian state to extinguish the Métis nation and the hereditary rights of Aboriginal peoples. Within the historical conditions of the times, he stood for the sovereignty of the peoples and fought for the unity of the Métis, Natives and settlers against the Anglo-Canadian colonial state. He actually led the peoples of the West to establish their own state to defend their interests against both the westward expansion of Canada and the northward expansion of the United States. To suggest that Riel stood for Confederation or for some abstract 'Canadian unity' is to distort history and to completely negate Riel's contribution to the struggles of the Métis and other Aboriginal peoples for their rights.

"Louis Riel would certainly make a strange 'founding father,' a 'founding father' hanged by other 'founding fathers' and their descendants! The disgusting behaviour of the Liberal government, which continues to defend the colonial legacy of the Canadian state, the murder of Riel and the devastation of the Métis nation under the hoax of someone else's 'hidden agenda,' proves that this government cannot even reconcile itself to the best that the nineteenth century had to offer, let alone lead Canada into the twenty-first century."

On January 7, 1998, the government finally issued a "Statement of Reconciliation," which read: "No attempt at reconciliation with the Aboriginal people can be complete without reference to the sad events culminating in the death of Métis leader Louis Riel. These events cannot be undone; however, we can and will continue to look for ways of affirming the contributions of Métis people in Canada and of reflecting Louis Riel's proper place in Canada's history."

The statements about Louis Riel made in 1996-97 clearly exposed the fact that it was the Chrétien Liberals who had the hidden agenda. *TML Daily* concluded at the time by pointing to the pathetic nature of attempts by the Liberal Party to distance itself from empire-building because it is not "politically correct," while maintaining the policy of colonial rule. The Liberal policy is no different today under Justin Trudeau. To this day, the Liberals cannot face the modern world of democratic renewal. In Canada, their high-sounding words about reconciliation and restoring nation-to-nation relations are to cover up maintaining the colonial relations enshrined in a Constitution which does not vest the decision-making power in the citizenry. It can be seen in the heinous racist acts committed by Canada to dispossess the Indigenous peoples at home and, abroad, to overthrow the Plurinational State of Bolivia where the first Indigenous president restored the dignity of the Indigenous peoples after centuries of discrimination and oppression under the aegis of racist *Indian Acts*.

(HBRC Archives)



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