

THIS MONTH'S THEME

# The Radical Twentieth Century

FROM THIS MONTH'S EDITOR

**T**HIS issue has had a longer genesis than most. Ten years ago, for my sins, I tried to write a history of the world in the scope of one issue of the NI. This fitted in with our perpetual promise to deliver a big subject in the palm of your hand ('easier to read than a book...') but probably represented my own particular strain of megalomania. I failed on one count to which I confessed openly – I needed 20 extra pages even to begin to do justice to the material. But there was another shortcoming which I managed to gloss over – I found it impossible to bring the narrative up to date, to take it beyond the Second World War.

This was partly because the post-War world, with its profusion of countries, concerns and sheer human numbers, is intrinsically much more complicated than the one which preceded it. But it was also too close for me to see it in its proper perspective.

Ever since then I've had the ambition of completing the work, of looking at the twentieth century as a whole, and the beginning of 1999 – a few months before the stream of mainstream retrospectives becomes a flood – seemed the natural time to do so.

Again, I've accomplished the task only by bursting the banks – even the broader banks of a January-February bumper issue. The 16-page booklet which accompanies this magazine is part and parcel of the whole: it recounts the key events of the century with an explicit bias towards the viewpoint of the poor and marginalized and of the resistance movements which represented them. In that sense it is a century-wide extension of our annual 'Chronicle', which selects the key events of the year with a particular eye to those affecting the Majority World – and our eight-page survey of key events and trends in 1998 begins on Page 36.

The bulk of this issue, however, is given over to an attempt to

reclaim the century from the opinion-mongers who are already saying its essential meaning lies in the victory of 'Truth, Justice and the American Way' over all comers – and if you think I am exaggerating the extravagance of their claims then you might start by examining a few of them on Page 7.

Our own idea of **The Radical Twentieth Century** is that many of the greatest social and political achievements of the century, many of the things humanity values most about itself, derive directly from the hard work and imagination of protest and resistance movements. We have therefore looked back on the century's events and trends from the point of view of five key movements: anti-colonialism, feminism, labour, peace and the environment.

What **The Radical Twentieth Century** shows is not only that events are shaped as much by the masses of ordinary people as by 'great' leaders (a standard but still valid Marxist point) but also that the world can be fundamentally changed by movements considered utterly lunatic when they start out. For a magazine which owes its very existence to the belief that there is a better way of ordering the world, there could be no better lesson to carry into the twenty-first century.



*Chris Brazier*

Chris Brazier

for the *New Internationalist* Co-operative

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JENNY MATTHEWS / FORMAT

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MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY ANDREW KOKOTKA.  
Front cover photographs: Gandhi (Hulton-Deutsch/Corbis); Mandela (Paul Velasco/ABPL/Corbis); suffragettes (Hulton-Deutsch/Corbis); peace plant (George W Wright/Corbis); Aung San Suu Kyi (Howard Davies/Corbis); Chinese Communists (UPI/Corbis-Bettmann); farmer (Glen Williams); baby (anon); painting by V Serov.