

EDITORIAL

Racism, the Right and the Toronto "Terrorism"

The political impact of the early June arrests of 17 men in Toronto was felt within but a few hours. Anti-Muslim racism has risen, with vandalism at a Toronto mosque and an attempted assault on a Montreal imam among the reported incidents.

Nowhere is anti-Muslim racism more apparent than in the mainstream media. While dutifully inserting "allegedly" into their articles journalists have been treating the accused as guilty-until-proven-innocent.

For example, in a racist tirade against Muslims in the *Globe and Mail* Christie Blatchford wrote "The accused men are mostly young and bearded in the Taliban fashion. They have first names like Mohamed, middle names like Mohamed and last names like Mohamed."

The implications are clear: fear your Muslim neighbours, and therefore hate your Muslim neighbours.

Journalist Robert Fisk noted how the press has taken to calling the accused "Canadian-born," or "home-grown" rather than "Canadian." The vicious insinuation is that Muslim-Canadians are not *really* citizens.

Stephen Harper's Conservative government is almost giddy, seizing the opportunity these arrests have served up on a platter. Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day announced that the Canadian state will be beefing-up its foreign intelligence-gathering capabilities. The debate is whether to create a new Canadian espionage service or simply transform CSIS into something resembling a small-scale version of the US CIA. The Conservatives have also revived an old Liberal initiative to force telecommunications companies to make it easier to conduct wiretaps on phones and monitor the activities of internet users.

Together, the responses of the Tory government, the other parties (the NDP included) and the media to the arrests bolster support for Canadian involvement in the US-led "War on Terror" (including in Afghanistan, analyzed in this issue). They also fuel racism, directing people's attention to something supposedly uniquely bad within the Muslim faith and away from both what Canada and other Western states are doing abroad and what people of colour experience within Canada. This will affect all who face racism, not just Muslims.

While we need to be very clear that those charged in Toronto must be presumed innocent, it would be foolish to deny that handfuls of people in Canada – as in other Western countries – are attracted to a kind of Muslim fundamentalist political ideology that is willing to engage in terrorist attacks on civilians like the bombings in London in July 2005. Why?

Saying that it's a matter of a few "bad people" is nonsense, and often racist. The *Globe and Mail* blames "the power of the romantic ideal of resistance to the oppression of Muslims" while claiming that "Muslims are not oppressed worldwide" or in Canada.

All this is a smokescreen that obscures realities that are extremely awkward for right-wing politicians and media types: the occupations of Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, and anti-Muslim racism internationally.

Afghanistan is ruled by a puppet government supported by Western states, Canada included. Iraq is under a brutal US military occupation that has carried out murderous atrocities. The Israeli state discriminates against its Arab citizens, and with its settlements, checkpoints, apartheid wall and other hostile policies has made a meaningful Palestinian state impossible.

These occupations and the rhetoric used by the leaders of the US and other states to justify the "War on Terror" have intensified the anti-Muslim racism (Islamophobia) that has long existed in the West as a result of Western imperial domination of the Middle East.

Faced with these realities – and with the weakness of left-wing anti-racist and anti-imperialist forces – some Muslims are drawn to religious fundamentalism that puts the blame on Western culture rather than the racist and imperialist capitalist system.

To explain why a few people are attracted to the version of such politics that's willing to engage in terrorism is not to support it. As we wrote in the September-October 2005 issue of *New Socialist*, "Terrorism doesn't help the struggle against war and occupation... Sowing mass fear by attacks on civilians has predictable consequences. It leads to state repression and the rise of racism."

As we can see now, even the arrest of alleged terrorists has the same effect on a smaller scale.

Now, more than ever, there is a need for anti-racist, anti-occupation mobilization. The demonstrations for Status for All! in several cities on May 27 need to be built on. The decision to support the global campaign against Israeli apartheid made by the convention of the Ontario Division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees needs to be defended.

We need to build more effective protest against the occupation of Afghanistan. We need to expose the Harper government's cut-off of aid to Palestine under the Hamas government for what it is: a campaign against suffering Palestinians, many now unpaid or unemployed, others starving. And we need to resist increasing surveillance and security measures, and denounce all signs of anti-Muslim racism. ★

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THE CONSERVATIVES AND CANADIAN CAPITAL

A new alliance?

BY MURRAY COOKE

The Liberal government led by Jean Chrétien was the most conservative federal government of the postwar period in terms of its economic and fiscal policy. However, the Conservative government led by Stephen Harper represents an even greater threat to the working class and oppressed groups. While limited by its position as a minority government, the Conservative Party is led by hardcore economic and social conservatives. Harper will be carefully attempting to forge a Conservative coalition that can produce a majority government which will be much more aggressive in pursuing its agenda.

One must be cautious in describing the 2006 election as a shift to the right. It would be more accurate to say the Liberals lost the election than to say the Conservatives won. Paul Martin's Liberals were reduced to minority status in 2004 and then shunted to the opposition benches in 2006. The sponsorship scandal and the revelations from the Gomery Commission led to the Liberals' defeat. By the 2006 election, the Liberals had alienated not only many voters but also many of their traditional allies in the capitalist class.

THE LIBERAL MINORITY AND CORPORATE CANADA

In February 2005, when the British magazine *The Economist* dubbed Paul Martin "Mr. Dithers," it gave voice to a common perception among Canadian business leaders. As Finance Minister, Martin had been heralded by the business elite, but his tenure as Prime Minister was being viewed with increasing disappointment from the same circles.

Ironically, Martin's downfall was largely due to the area in which he had built his reputation: fiscal prudence. The financial scandals of the sponsorship program started while he was Finance Minister. Ultimately, Martin's minority government would be seen from the business perspective as reckless with spending and insufficiently aggressive with tax cuts. Before and during the 2005-06 election campaign, the Liberals were accused of being on a spending spree.

After being reduced to a minority government in 2004,



Canada's Prime Minister: Stephen Harper

Martin reached a \$41 billion, ten-year deal with the provinces for healthcare. In December 2004, Jack Mintz, the head of the right-wing C.D. Howe Institute, complained in *Canadian Business* magazine about a Liberal "spending orgy." Mintz suggested that we were seeing "the return of government to the 1980s: lots of misdirected social spending, accompanied by subsidies geared to save politically favoured industries from international competition." He was especially critical of federal activity in areas of provincial jurisdiction such as cities and childcare.

Then in early 2005, Martin signed a deal with Newfoundland over the relationship between equalization payments and the province's offshore oil and gas revenues. This deal led to a similar deal with Nova Scotia and demands from Saskatchewan. The Conference Board of Canada, among others, complained that Martin appeared to be agreeing to expensive ad hoc arrangements with little concern for the overall coherence of the equalization payments system.

Business concerns about the minority government were magnified by the Liberal-NDP partnership over the 2005 budget. The NDP amendment included a \$4.6 billion spending increase and cancelled corporate tax cuts. Nancy Hughes-Anthony, the president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce complained that "it puts Mr. Martin's credibility in doubt and Mr. Goodale's credibility in doubt...Canada's reputation as a place to do business will be tarnished by this

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decision.” Tom d’Aquino, the president of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE), described the rollback of tax cuts to be “bad policy that does not serve the interests of Canadians.”

The CCCE is the peak organization of Canadian business, comprised of the chief executive officers of 150 of the largest corporations in the country. In June 2005, the Executive Committee of the CCCE issued a highly critical statement on the direction of the federal government. Overall, it declared that “as a political entity, Canada is a nation adrift. A minority federal government is frittering away the fruits of years of sacrifice...In the political arena, the very idea of strategic policy-making is drowning in the swirling search for momentary tactical advantage.”

Specifically, they warned that “The country’s fiscal base remains strong, but is threatened by runaway spending growth.” On foreign affairs, the CCCE warned that: “The most direct threat to Canada’s interests lies in terrorism’s potential to undermine the efficient flow of goods and people across our border with our largest trading partner, the United States. But the more fundamental threat is to the open global economy on which our prosperity is based and to the values that lie at the heart of our society.” Therefore, the CCCE applauded the expansion of military spending in the budget. According to a separate press release, “The CCCE has argued for many years that an effective military is essential to protect Canada’s sovereignty, do our share in defending North America and make a meaningful contribution to global peace and security.” The CCCE has also been very critical of the Kyoto Accord: “We remain deeply concerned...with the government’s public commitment to the costly and unattainable target set by the Kyoto Protocol.”

Business leaders blamed the Liberals for souring Canada’s relationship with the United States. In 2005, Tom d’Aquino of the CCCE went on a speaking tour of the US calling for a North American customs union, energy pact and security perimeter. On missile defence, he told American audiences that “like many Canadians, I am greatly disappointed by the decision of my government to reject a course of action so manifestly in our national interest and so consistent with our long-standing commitment to the defence of North America. It is my hope that this decision will be reversed by a future Parliament...that will recognize the logic and wisdom of full Canadian participation and that will vigorously make the case for involvement to the electorate.” In December 2005 in another issue of *Canadian Business*, Jack Mintz worried that

Martin had been heralded by
the business elite, but was
viewed with increasing
disappointment.

if trends continue, “Our relations with the U.S. shall be strained: a protectionist Congress will be in a surly mood to negotiate trade issues with a marijuana-exporting, missile-defence-opposing country that criticizes US policy.”

At a public forum shortly after the 2006 election and in a subsequent article for the *Globe and Mail*, Canada’s former ambassador to the United States Allan Gotlieb suggested that the Martin government offered lessons on how not to manage Canada-US relations. From this vantage point, even the minutely independent stance taken by the Liberal government on foreign policy is too much. Gotlieb suggested that, “Surely it’s time to tone down our rhetoric and handle our differences with greater regard for US sensitivities.”

On fiscal policy, foreign policy and the Kyoto Accord, the Liberals were offside with the leadership of the Canadian capitalist class.

BUSINESS TURNS TO THE CONSERVATIVES

Historically, Canadian capitalists have hedged their bets by financially backing the two main political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives. The collapse of Mulroney’s coalition of western conservatives, Bay Street and Quebec nationalists created a dilemma for business. They succeeded in ensuring that the Chrétien Liberals followed the neoliberal path, but the collapse of the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) and the emergence of the Reform Party split the right-wing opposition. Business embraced and bankrolled the Liberal government but was unsure

about the opposition parties.

The Reform Party was spawned by western disappointment with the Mulroney government. Formed as a regional protest party, Reform received support from members of the Alberta oil patch. The formation of the Reform Party was also supported and promoted by Ted Byfield, the owner/publisher of the hard-right, Christian fundamentalist *Alberta Report* and *BC Report* magazines. Stephen Harper was among the former Progressive Conservatives who supported the formation of a new more solidly right-wing option. At the founding convention of the Reform Party in 1987, Harper complained that “the Mulroney government has shown itself far too willing to back down on the issues that matter to its political base.”

The Reform Party achieved its electoral breakthrough in the 1993 election. The party’s main electoral pledge was to eliminate the deficit in three years, which garnered approval from the *Globe and Mail* and other media. Still, Reform did not have the widespread support of Canadian business. In

1993, Reform received a little over \$100,000 from corporations compared to \$13.2 million for the PCs and \$8.3 million for the Liberals. Even after 1993, the Canadian business elite didn't know what to make of the Reform Party.

Reform's financial support from business was limited because it didn't appear as a legitimate contender for power and it was confined to the west. Headquartered primarily in the Toronto-Montreal corridor, corporate Canada was nervous about Reform's populism and its anti-French, anti-Quebec stance. Corporate Canada always saw Reform as too unpredictable and divisive. During the election year of 1997, corporations gave just over \$3 million to Reform and its candidates, while the PCs received close to \$9 million and the Liberals scored over \$16 million. Large corporations were now funding three political parties. For example, the chartered banks were making roughly equal contributions to the Liberals and PCs while donating smaller, but sizable amounts to Reform.

It wasn't until 2000 and the transformation of Reform into the Canadian Alliance (CA) that the party was able to tap into large sources of corporate funds. Buoyed by a leadership race that included Tom Long, an Ontario candidate and one of the architects of the Mike Harris regime, the CA and its candidates received over \$9 million from corporations in the election year of 2000, compared to only \$3.8 million for the PCs (the Liberals cruised along with over \$17 million). However, Stockwell Day and the CA failed to "unite the right," break into Ontario or seriously challenge the Liberals. These failures and the dysfunctional nature of Day's leadership led to increased pressure from business upon the CA and PCs to get their act together.

Stephen Harper defeated Day for the leadership of the CA in 2002. Though extremely critical of Joe Clark and other "red Tories," Harper had spent years calling for a coalition of conservative forces from across the country. By 2003, with Manning and Day out of the way, the door was opened to a merger on the Right once Peter McKay replaced Joe Clark. The merger was pushed externally by the capitalist class, and internally by fears of being crushed by Paul Martin.

On his way out the door, Prime Minister Chrétien dropped two bombs on his successor: the sponsorship scandal and a new election finance law that severely limits the ability of corporations and unions to finance political parties. Individuals can donate up to \$5,000 per party, while unions and corporations are limited to \$1,000 per candidate. Over

the previous ten years, the Liberals had raised huge sums of money from the corporate sector while struggling to generate small donations from individuals. Therefore, it's not surprising that Liberal Party president Stephen LeDrew described the new law as "dumb as a bag of hammers."

THE NEW CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

The new Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) was officially created in December 2003. During the last three and a half weeks of the year (the last year under the old rules), the party received \$3.3 million from corporations including \$380,000 from Magna International. During the 2004 CPC leadership campaign, Harper raised \$2.7 million, a large sum of money that included many corporate donations, but it is paltry compared to Martin's \$12 million war chest.

The Liberals have been slow to adapt to the new party finance regime. In 2005, the Conservatives were able to raise more than twice as much money (close to \$18 million) as the Liberals (close to \$8 million) and more than three times as much money as the NDP (slightly more than \$5 million).

While 70% of the contributions received by the Conservatives were under \$200 only 59% of NDP and 24% of Liberal contributions fell into this category. The Liberals appear to be reliant on a relatively small base of wealthy individuals, while the Conservatives have a much larger number of contributors, many of them donating small amounts.

The Conservatives have grassroots support but Harper has also positioned

the party to strengthen its ties to the corporate elite. Two days after the 2006 election victory, the *Globe and Mail* reported that, "a small group of Ontario-based business leaders have held meetings with Mr. Harper at Stornoway [the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition] over the past two years to build bridges to the new party." An unnamed bank official was quoted as saying, "Every large business with registered lobbyists would have had people talking to Stephen Harper and his caucus for several years."

Bay Street gave positive reviews to Harper's cabinet choices, including the appointment of Jim Flaherty as Finance Minister. Perrin Beatty, a former cabinet minister under Mulroney, and now the president of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, told the *National Post* that "Mr. Flaherty is well-known to the business community in Toronto. I found him an excellent person to deal with because he's open, businesslike and effective." Garth Whyte

On fiscal policy, foreign policy and the Kyoto Accord, the Liberals were offside with the leadership of the Canadian capitalist class.

of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business described Flaherty as a “thoughtful guy...He reads everything that’s put before him. We want a multi-year tax and debt-reduction plan – and I think we are going to get it.” Tom d’Aquino of the CCCE suggested that “We see it as a government that will govern from conviction. We see it as a government that will be bold, even though it is constrained by its minority status.” An unnamed Bay Street executive was quoted in the *Globe* as saying that “These are true blue Conservatives, not pink Tories.”

Yet, a few reservations emerged from business circles. For example, the *Globe* described Gary Lunn, the Natural Resources Minister, as typical of the Conservative cabinet in that “he has first-hand experience in small business, but little connection to Corporate Canada.” Aware of this limitation, Harper sought out ministers more directly connected with the corporate elite. The two surprise additions to the cabinet, former Liberal David Emerson and the unelected Michael Fortier, were presented as additions to represent major cities, Vancouver and Montreal respectively. They should perhaps be more accurately seen as representatives of corporate Canada. Along with stints as a high-level civil servant in the BC government, Emerson was previously the CEO of forestry giant Canfor Corp. He was also one of the few Liberals to have endorsed bank mergers, another bone of contention between sections of business and the Liberals. As the minister responsible for the Vancouver Olympics, Emerson will be working to ensure that public funds enrich corporate interests.

Fortier is an investment banker formerly with Crédit Suisse First Boston and then TD Securities. Previously he practiced law with Ogilvy Renault, the same firm as Brian Mulroney. He also has vast experience as a corporate fundraiser for the PCs and the new CPC. An unnamed investment banker was quoted in the *Globe* as pointing out that “For all of Flaherty’s experience, he’s not a Bay Street guy, while Fortier is a real player...[he] can give a sense of how the capital markets will react to their plans.” As a banker and lawyer, Fortier is seen as having the skills to handle privatizations and public-private partnerships.

The new government is following the agenda set by the CCCE. Conservative priorities include tax cuts, reigning in federal government spending, gutting Canada’s commitment to the Kyoto Accord and improving relations with the US. The Harper government’s first budget presented a wide range



Former Prime Minister Mr. Dithers/Paul Martin

of tax cuts, including cuts to corporate taxes and capital taxes. The promise to address the fiscal imbalance with the provinces will involve significantly downsizing the federal government.

The Conservative Party’s ties to the oil patch are demonstrated by the new government’s approach to the Kyoto Accord. The new Environment Minister is Rona Ambrose, an Alberta MP who previously worked for the Klein government. One of the government’s first actions was eliminating the funding for 15 projects related to climate change. Canada’s commitment to Kyoto, which was tenuous at best under the Liberals, is now effectively dead.

The Conservatives have acted quickly to improve relations with the US. Michael Wilson, formerly Brian Mulroney’s Finance Minister, was appointed as ambassador to the US. In 2003 he criticized the Liberal government for not supporting the American war against Iraq. The Harper government quickly finalized a controversial deal with the Americans on softwood lumber. They also reached an agreement to renew NORAD and extend it to marine surveillance.

The election of 2006 was in many ways a repeat of 2004. The results were actually not very different. One of the clearest differences, however, was the media treatment of the respective parties and leaders. In 2006, Harper was portrayed in a more positive fashion and Martin in a less flattering manner compared to the previous election. Obviously the continuing revelations about the sponsorship scandal had something to do with this, but perhaps it also reflects a wider sense among the business elite and the corporate media that it was time for a change.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONSERVATIVES

Stephen Harper has a BA and MA in Economics from the University of Calgary. Throughout his years in partisan politics and his tenure as president of the National Citizens Coalition, Harper's main focus has been taxation, government finance and reducing state intervention in the market economy. Harper has consistently attacked federal intervention in provincial areas of jurisdiction, including health and social policy. In January 2001, Harper co-wrote the Alberta "firewall" letter, calling on Ralph Klein to create an Alberta Pension Plan, an Alberta personal income tax system, an Alberta Provincial Police force, and to ignore the Canada Health Act and hold a provincial referendum on Senate reform.

Although Harper is an evangelical Christian and a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, he has rarely appeared as an enthusiastic supporter of social conservatism. For years, he has advised his party not to take policy positions on so-called moral issues, but to leave this to the individual MP. On various social issues (including same-sex marriage, abortion, bilingualism, multiculturalism and immigration), he has warned of the dangers of extremism and their potential to damage the party image. The success of the Conservatives in keeping a tight lid on their candidates was a key aspect of their success in the 2006 election.

Still, Harper has been well aware of the importance of social conservatives to the party as voters but even more importantly as the activist and financial base. Harper has frequently courted the social conservative vote and insisted upon the compatibility of social and economic conservatism. In an April 2003 speech that was revised for publication in *Report* magazine, Harper made an unusually outspoken pitch for the importance of social conservatism. He pointed out that fiscal conservatives have been so successful that liberal and social democratic parties have enacted neoliberal policies. "The real challenge is therefore not economic, but the social agenda of the modern Left...while retaining a focus on economic issues, we must give greater place to social values and social conservatism." Accusing the Left of "moral nihilism," he suggested that, "On a wide range of public-policy questions, including foreign affairs and defence, criminal justice and corrections, family and child care, and healthcare and social services, social values are increasingly the really big issues."

Furthermore, "the emerging debates on foreign affairs should be fought on moral grounds...Conservatives must take the moral stand, with our allies, in favour of the fundamental values of our society, including democracy, free enterprise and individual freedom." Whether this was an attempt to shore up social conservative support for his leadership or a sincere indication of his views on the direction of the party, this speech indicates that it would be a mistake to underestimate the strength of social conservatism of the CPC under Harper's leadership.



The *Alberta report*: was an ideology tool for the Right.

The 26 member Conservative cabinet includes at least nine ministers that are prominent social conservatives. The most notable and highly placed are Stockwell Day, the Minister for Public Safety, Vic Toews, the Justice Minister and Attorney General and Monte Solberg, the Immigration Minister. Unlike recent Immigration Ministers who have hailed from Canada's largest cities, Solberg is the MP from Medicine Hat, a riding in which less than 9% of the population is comprised of immigrants. Obviously this reduces the incentive for the minister to be sensitive to the concerns of immigrants. Solberg is unlikely to feel any direct political heat for the recent crackdown and deportations.

CONCLUSION

None of the opposition parties are in a rush to bring down the government, which provides the Conservatives with a window of opportunity to try and broaden their support before the next election. The underlying preoccupations of the Liberal leadership race are likely to be patching up relations with business and searching for a leader who has the ability to attract funds both from business and individual Canadians. The government of Stephen Harper will be actively pursuing the agenda of the capitalist class and trying to appease the social conservatives from the party base, while hoping that tax cuts and addressing the fiscal imbalance with the provinces can attract the voters that he needs, especially in Quebec, to take the next step to a majority government.★

Canada signs up for permanent war

BY HAROLD LAVENDER

Canada's foreign policy is marching down the road to war.

The past Liberal government pioneered an aggressive "responsibility to protect" doctrine (with a beefed up military component) in so-called "failed states" such as Afghanistan and Haiti. Stephen Harper's new Conservative government has sharply accelerated this interventionist trend.

Afghanistan has become the symbol of Canada's new military and foreign policy, and a centerpiece of the Harper agenda.

On May 17, the minority Conservative government, with only hours notice, pushed a motion through the House of Commons to extend Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan for two more years until 2009. The motion came at a time of strong public scepticism about Canada's military intervention in Afghanistan. Polls even suggested a slight majority opposed.

The motion narrowly passed by 149 to 145, with the Liberal party splitting over the issue. The NDP and Bloc Quebecois, citing mission changes, voted No. Previously, they had done nothing to oppose the Canadian presence in Afghanistan.

The mainstream peace movement has done somewhat better, but they have not engaged in mass mobilization calling on Canada to bring its troops home. Harper's quick vote forestalled any possibility of mass demonstrations in Ottawa.

The Liberal government was politically unable to send troops to Iraq. By



Chief of Defence Staff Rick Hillier calls for more money for military spending.

contrast, the Afghan mission extension represents a defeat for the anti-war movement. However, Afghanistan will remain a central issue over the next few years and could come back to haunt Harper. The US has Iraq. Canada has Afghanistan.

The Canadian Forces are currently engaged in their biggest military mission since the Korean War, in which thousands of Canadian troops fought and hundreds died in the service of western imperialism.

The myth of Canadian troops as benign UN blue-helmeted peacekeepers remains widespread. But the reality of recent years is very much otherwise. 68 per cent of Canada's international military spending is Afghan-related while only 3 per cent is devoted to UN peacekeeping operations.

Currently 2,300 Canadian troops are participating in counter-insurgency warfare in the Kandahar province in southeastern Afghanistan. They are engaged in "Operation Archer," which is tightly linked to the US "Operation Enduring Freedom." The mission is not

currently under NATO command, though it may be in future. The Harper government's successful extension vote opens the door for Canada to lead NATO operations in Afghanistan in 2008.

THE AFGHAN QUAGMIRE

In the wake of September 2001, the US unleashed its military machine on Afghanistan, chiefly in the form of massive bombardments. Overwhelming US military firepower and the well armed forces of the Northern Alliance forced the oppressive Islamic-fundamentalist Taliban regime to melt away. US forces occupied Afghanistan and helped install Washington's friends in power.

But nearly five years after the occupation of Afghanistan, the country remains far from "stabilized." Instead, the Taliban and others opposed to the pro-Washington government of Hamid Karzai have considerably stepped up their military operations.

Some 8,000 US troops remain engaged in offensive operations in Afghanistan, including indiscriminate bombing. They are sustaining steady losses, with the yearly death toll reaching new heights in 2005.

Harold Lavender is an editor of New Socialist and long time anti-war activist in Vancouver.

But Washington is far more preoccupied with Iraq, where victory is not in sight. The US military is overextended, so it has sought to transfer part of the responsibility for Afghanistan to NATO and a “coalition of the willing” that includes Canada.

On July 11 2005, Canada’s Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier ranted about the forces arrayed against NATO in Afghanistan: “These are detestable murderers and scumbags. They detest our freedoms, they detest our society, they detest our liberties.”

Hillier has also sought to dispel notions of the Canadian military as a peaceful humanitarian force in world affairs: “We are the Canadian Forces and our job is to be able to kill people.”

In August 2005, Major General Andrew Leslie said, “Afghanistan is a 20-year venture. There are things worth fighting for. There are things worth dying for. There are things worth killing for.” In explaining why Canada had to be in Afghanistan for the long term, Leslie said, “Every time you kill an angry young man overseas you’re creating 15 more who will come after you.”

Stephen Harper, evoking the spirit and rhetoric of George W. Bush, has pledged his government will not “cut and run.” And, like Bush in Iraq, he wants to stay until “the job is done.”

No one believes the job will be done soon, including Afghan President Karzai, who appealed for an extended Canadian commitment.

JUSTIFYING WAR

Stephen Harper has framed Canada’s role in Afghanistan in terms of national security and the war on terrorism. Harper does not hesitate to invoke the ghosts of 9-11, Al Qaeda and the World Trade Centre.

However, such motivations are unconvincing to millions. At the beginning of the year, public opinion surveys suggested weak support for Canada’s mission in Afghanistan. Since then, we have been treated to a steady diet of war propaganda in the corporate media and the CBC.

Much of this propaganda seeks to get the public to identify with the military – “our troops.”

The military is portrayed as part of a



balanced “3-D approach” (defence, diplomacy and developmental assistance) to a democratic Afghan government. Soldiers’ humanitarian role is magnified.

The government claims to be defending human rights, women’s rights, freedom, democracy and the rule of law in Afghanistan.

It says Canada is playing a vital role in assisting with the reconstruction of Afghanistan. This much is true: Afghanistan has now become the largest single recipient of bilateral Canadian aid. By 2009, the Canadian government will have contributed \$1 billion. But this aid is far less than the military costs: \$4 billion and rising.

HARSH REALITIES

Life expectancy in Afghanistan is 42 years. The large majority of the population lives in desperate poverty. The economy has been shattered by years of war. The people, seeing themselves as victims of war from many sides, yearn for peace. With the Taliban gone, tribal warlords and the drug trade have flourished.

Opium seems to be the main source of ready wealth. Afghanistan is now estimated to produce 90 per cent of the world’s supply. Up to 2 million poor farmers, lacking other alternatives to survive, are now growing poppies.

Afghanistan held US-style elections, and thus passed the test of formal democracy. However, the process has been corrupted. Drug lords not only buy the support of candidates, in some cases they are candidates.

Canadian forces are working in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), pioneered by US troops to show that the US was helping the Afghan people. Teams of soldiers engage in a strange mix of providing security, carrying out small reconstruction and humanitarian aid projects and gathering intelligence information.

Aid groups like Doctors Without Borders have sharply objected to mixing military and humanitarian projects. They say this process jeopardizes the safety of aid workers, who are no longer seen as neutral, and that the PRTs effectively hold the receiving population hostage to military demands.

The Bush administration claims that millions of Afghan girls are now attending school. But there are very few schools in rural areas, and those in operation have very limited and non-secular curriculums focusing on Islamic studies. In 2005, Amnesty International released a damning report titled “Women Still Under Attack.” It says violence against women and girls in Afghanistan is pervasive, including abductions, rapes by armed individuals, forced marriages and sale to settle disputes and debts. Women face discrimination from strict religious traditions and state officials.

The Canadian government claims it is supporting human rights. Yet, ordinary Afghan civilians arrested in military operations cannot challenge the basis of their detention, and have no access to legal counsel.

The economic stakes for control of Iraqi oil are self-evident, but global geo-

political considerations and economic interests are also in play in Afghanistan. There are large and untapped reserves of oil and gas in the Central Asian republics east of the Caspian Sea. Corporations want to build a pipeline through Afghanistan (bypassing Iran and Russia). The US is trying to bolster its presence in central Asia. The Pentagon is obsessed with the growing power of China and its potential alliance with Russia.

The US serves as the main military protector of the new world order. Canadian imperialism has benefited from this without getting too deeply implicated.

STAKE IN GLOBALIZATION

Canadian capital has a huge stake in the globalization process. It wants its interests protected. It wants freedom to invest and it wants access to global resources.

Canadian corporations profit from war production but Canada successfully portrays itself as more multilateral and less militaristic than the US.

Nonetheless, Canada spends a lot of money on the military. This is projected to rise to \$25 billion annually in the next few years, well over 10 per cent of federal program spending. This reflects the new imperialist mentality of protecting the people of the world from failed states (in reality a recycled version of the racist notion of the “white man’s burden”).

The Martin government, while mouthing occasional rhetorical criticism of US policy, took the lead in allocating billions to a new military build up. But they were not alone. NDP leader Jack Layton insisted his party was not anti-military, pointing to the NDP’s support for the last Liberal government budget, which included large increases in military spending.

The Conservative budget has offered the military another billion dollars a year, both to purchase new equipment and to expand regular and reserve armed forces. The military has gone on an aggressive recruiting drive, even targeting high schools.

This drive to boost military spending was fuelled by the generals and a powerful military corporate complex. Canada has a substantial war industry, largely controlled by a small number of giant

corporations. They stand to profit from open access to US government and global arms contracts, as well as increased Canadian government orders.

The Afghanistan mission is very much in line with Corporate Canada’s pursuit of “deep integration” with the US. Canadian corporations see unfettered access to the US market as vital to their economic interests. To get it, they favour increasing harmonization with US policies on defence, border security, immigration, energy supply, etc. This process, initiated by the Liberals, is being fast tracked by the new Harper government

But we should not focus solely on Harper or Bush. It was Liberal interventionists who entangled us in Afghanistan. The Liberals are choosing a new leader. If Michael Ignatieff or someone of similar ilk wins, Canadians will have the freedom to choose their poison – either hard-line Bush-style neo-conservative interventionism or more two-faced morality-laced liberal interventionism. Meanwhile, NDP Leader Jack Layton has suggested that Darfur is the right mission for Canadian troops. It’s a moot point, since Harper and the Canadian military are totally locked into Afghanistan. But it does reflect a hunger for “Canada the Good,” in which Canadian peacekeepers help build a better world. But in a world dominated by imperialist military and economic power it is naive and diverts energy from building a movement opposed to military interventionism and occupation.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

The Canadian people are not stupid. People are capable of learning from history, including the US government’s dishonest and ruinous war in Iraq. Many sense that our political leaders are taking Canada down the garden path to war and don’t want to go there.

But no one should underestimate the task of building the kind of mass movement necessary to force the Canadian government to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

Wars, even on a small scale, generate virulently patriotic forces. This in turn dampens political courage and feeds political opportunism.

The NDP and Bloc Quebecois had previously acted with utter spinelessness

on Afghanistan. When they opposed the extension of Canada’s mission in Afghanistan, Harper came out swinging with a smear campaign saying they don’t support our troops.

Will the labour bureaucracy and other social forces show political courage and take a clear political stance opposing the war in Afghanistan? Or will opposition have to be built from the grassroots up?

Over the last year, a Haiti solidarity movement picked up steam and played a modest but effective role in unmasking Canadian alignment with the coup forces that ousted former president Aristide.

The movement succeeded in identifying with the aspirations of the Haitian people and their determined struggle against a repressive new regime.

DIFFICULT PROBLEMS

But Afghanistan is not Haiti, and it poses many difficult problems. As a result, there is no Afghan solidarity movement.

The Afghan people have been entombed by what Gilbert Achcar has described as the “Clash of Barbarisms.” The oppressive rule of the Taliban has ended, only to be replaced by foreign imperialist occupation while mass misery continues.

Some Canadians, like former Liberal health minister Ujjal Dosanjh, claim the people are now better off than under the heel of “clerical fascism” and Canada needs to stop the return of the Taliban.

But this misses the point. People in the Muslim world have many reasons to distrust and hate the West. Occupations are never well received. They inevitably generate resistance. In the case of Afghanistan, this has largely been led by Islamic fundamentalist forces with a very reactionary social agenda. But this should not blind us to the primary responsibility of imperialism.

It is folly to believe that Canada, acting as a representative of “the civilized world,” can help liberate Afghanistan. Unlike the generals and gung-ho interventionists like Harper, many Canadians don’t see a legitimate reason to wage war, kill and be killed in Afghanistan. Thank goodness! If fully mobilized, these sentiments have the potential to stop Ottawa from plunging us into an unending series of permanent imperialist wars. ★

Harper's attack on women, workers and children

BY MARK CONNERY

Three cheers for the best direct action of 2006 thus far! In mid-April in Burnaby, BC, while announcing his plan of inaction for children, Stephen Harper had his nose squeezed by a six month old child, Solomon Buster Sitar.

Amongst the most stressful things we do are raise children and work for pay. Stephen Harper is clearly trying to make both harder and more unpleasant to do. The Conservatives' cancellation of an attempt at a national child care plan and their proposed \$1200 children's allowance is a vicious attack on working women. It helps to shore up support from both social and fiscal conservatives, undermine confidence and support for non-profit child care and public education from kindergarten to grad school, and create hazards for people dependent on existing programs.

In the lead up to the last federal election, there were numerous instances reported in the mainstream media of students considering dropping their studies in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and of working mothers looking to move because there wouldn't be sufficient child care options to allow them a decent living. Pragmatically, these decisions may not be bad ones. Overwhelmingly, women provide care, both in the family home and as paid workers.

Statistics Canada reported in April that more than half of the children under five

were being cared for outside the family home, in licensed non-profit or for-profit centers, nanny services, non-licensed neighbourhood homes or by extended family. This reflects the deeper integration of women into the Canadian labour pool.

WHAT KIND OF CARE?

While many neighbours or family members may do a fine job of caring for a child, their ability to do so is often unreliable. Along with extended family, for-profit child care services and non-licensed babysitting services come greater possibilities for abuse, unsanitary conditions, poor nutrition, lack of access to public support and lousy (or no) earnings for the people who are doing this difficult work. This is hardly the way children or their families deserve to be treated. I have heard of one "center" (really someone's basement) where children were having fruit taken from them because their caregiver could not afford to buy fruit or vegetables for themselves.

Canceling support for public child care is another way of reinforcing key ideological tenets of neo-conservatism: there is no society, only individuals and families; we get what we deserve; market forces will solve problems; women are meant to be kept in their place.

Is expanding child care dead? No. Basic tendencies of liberal capitalism drive women (and the occasional would-be stay at home dad) to work out of the home for wages. Women in Quebec with



Kids don't like Harper.

access to less expensive and more (but not enough) child care spaces are able to participate in the work force in a more consistent way, helping to ensure their social and economic rights. Alberta, on the other hand, is facing particular labour shortages due in no small part to the erosion of social services under the Klein Conservatives. About 70% of Canadian mothers of children five and under work outside the home; only about 15% of Canadian children 12 and under have access to a regulated childcare spot. Please note the disparity of ages! Young children need much more care and attention than children a few years older. This penny-pinching is just one more attack on women and children.

THE AUSTRALIAN MODEL

A recent *Globe and Mail* editorial argued for "Aussie-rules daycare." Australia has been offering relatively generous subsidies for parents to encour-

Mark Connery is a sometimes overemployed sometimes underemployed childcare worker living in Toronto.

age a neo-liberal venture capital approach to childcare. Two-thirds of child care spaces in Australia are in for-profit centers. This represents a Walmartization of child care where, yes, the basic services are there, but questions of human rights and equity, living wages and basic social rationality are out the window. Child rearing is state-subsidized, with parents as shoppers and children as problems to be dealt with.

In light of the April 2006 federal budget and the drive towards privatization, it is entirely possible that Canadian child care could be moving in this direction. The tax cuts being offered in the current budget only apply to organizations which are taxed. This excludes the non-profit centers which have been proven to be the best for children, their families and for workers. Small federal grants and tax cuts would be start-up money rather than sustained funding. Capital investments in infrastructure – providing adequate funding to make or adapt centers to be child care friendly – are a relatively small part of the overall cost of quality child care. The primary cost is labour.

Feeding, cleaning, toileting, providing creative activities, reading, negotiating conflicts and difficult emotions, teaching how to wash hands and tie shoes – doing all this with and for young children takes a lot of work. The burnout rate in ECE is quite high. With federal and provincial cuts to post-secondary education, the debt burden for graduates of ECE and related fields grows higher and higher, while in general wages and benefits in the care field stagnate.

CHILD CARE AND THE LEFT

So where is the Left in all this? A number of important campaigns have been developing. The best has been coming from the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which has been pressuring different governments on these issues in coalition with community and intellectual allies. The Canadian Auto Workers has also been strong on child care and has been part of developing innovative strategies for childcare. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has taken up the fight as well with public advertising demanding a decent child care plan. Despite the conservatism of the

CLC, it does appear to support this issue and may be an area that it could be pushed further on. The federal NDP is lackluster on this issue. While it has a strong women's caucus, and their critic on this issue, Olivia Chow, actually knows about childcare, the party's platform is weak and is timidly reformist, well to the right of center-left advocacy groups.

However, sectarian rejections of modest reforms are no way forward. Caring for children can have a conservative influence on caregivers. Worrying about how much milk Lucy drank, or how Ahmed scraped his knee and why, or will Benjamin grow up to be an axe murderer because he was hugged at the wrong time and on and on, makes working people shut down at certain points. Paying attention to all these details and attending to an overwhelming number of needs while keeping one's sanity discourages involvement in broader forms of social, cultural and political life. The organization of child care centers and the training of child care workers is most often rigidly authoritarian and intellectually disengaging. While I worked towards my own diploma I was not required to read anything but parts of textbooks and endless numbers of loose photocopied handouts.

NEGLIGENT ON CHILDREN'S ISSUES

The Right has had a strong grasp on families and children (and wishes to retain it) while the Left has been negligent on children's issues. The more radical Left has been weak on children's issues for many different reasons. Ultra-left critiques of the family, once popular amongst segments of the sexual liberation movements of the 70s and 80s, and a base conservatism around childhood and actual children haunt us. Popular images of childhood and children are laden with saccharine sentimentality. In reality, children are disempowered, denied basic needs and desires and

frequent victims of violence at the hands of adults and other children. The Harper government wishes to both raise the age for sexual consent from 14 to 16 years, while allowing 14 year olds to be tried as adults.

WHERE CAN WE GO FROM HERE?

The parents as consumers model of childcare will help reinforce the oppression of children, and may lead to the covering up of abuses and lack of support for families as wholes. The kind of child care that socialists need to fight for is free, universal and democratically-run centers and agencies with an explicitly pro-child perspective. When I first volunteered with infants and toddlers I had flags raised about the possible abuse of a child. A woman who mentored me said, "When it comes to picking a side I always side with the child." Caregivers, whether paid or unpaid, need to be given that mandate, along with adequate opportunities for education, dialogue and social support and without fear of violence or poverty.

A number of positive steps can be taken. Many child care centers run on the sweat of part-time casual women workers, who often work more than full-time. These women are often immigrants or the children of immigrants. Alliances between anti-poverty groups, immigrant and refugee rights groups, community organizations, arts and cultural groups and labour unions will be crucial. Expanding licensed child care is necessary, but so are other spaces for children, like parks, community centers and sports, library and recreation programs.

Support is also needed for existing organizations and campaigns. In political terms, the best of these are essentially social democratic. Proponents of genuine socialism need to support the modest improvements in child care that such organizations and campaigns demand while also proposing more effective and creative strategies and tactics.★

By far the best single research resource is the Childcare Canada Resource Unit's site at <http://www.childcarecanada.org/> It features up-to-date news stories, research papers, and loads of background information. Readers will also want to look to <http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/> for information on progressive advocacy work.

An apple a day?

BY ETHAN MEYERS AND DEBORAH SIMMONS

During his campaign in the recent federal election, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an astounding reversal of his earlier position on health care.

Right up until last year, Harper had asserted his support for a two-tier health care system. In 1998, he called for scrapping the Canada Health Act. In 2002, Harper told the *Toronto Star* that “Moving toward alternatives, including those provided by the private sector, is a natural development of our health care system.”

The election race forced Harper to push this perspective into the closet, claiming that he is opposed to a two-tier system. However, this doesn't negate ongoing federal efforts to dismantle our Medicare system.

We've come a long way since the struggles of the 1930s Depression that led to calls for universal health care. Pioneered in Saskatchewan, it was not until 1966 that the national health care system was established. Since that time, Canada has been recognized internationally as a centre for innovative thinking about health care. However, this thinking has been invariably co-opted to underpin federal and provincial efforts to cut health care costs. The current perspective of the Conservative government is a logical extension of this history.

A central axis in debates among health care theorists in this country has been about the relative importance of cure versus prevention, distilled in the old adage “an apple a day keeps the doctor away.” Though the value of preventing

Although the value of preventing human suffering and injury may seem commonsense, only a small percentage of health expenditure goes toward prevention.

human suffering and injury in the first place may seem commonsense, only a small percentage of total health expenditure (5% of the \$142 billion spent in 2005) goes toward prevention and public health programs.

Even the nature of prevention has been subject to debate, since it raises the question of how health is affected by social factors. If the dimensions of health are not limited to physical disease, to what extent should the health care system be responsible for addressing social causes of ill-health?

MEDICAL INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Canada's health care system is founded on a biomedical model that narrowly focuses on the physical causes and processes of disease. In this model, disease is prevented by using medications and vaccines, or reducing exposure to known risk factors. Health policies based on this model involve health and safety regulations or health education campaigns to persuade people to avoid risk factors or encourage them to seek regular health screening.

The biomedical model is strongly linked to clinical practice. Access to clinics and hospitals, medical technologies and pharmaceuticals are seen as the key to quality health care. As a result, by far the largest component of health care expenditures has historically been in

physicians, new buildings, medical machinery, and drugs.

Despite new theories and policies accounting for the non-medical aspects of health, the biomedical model continues to be the dominant influence in our health care system. A powerful lobby including the Canadian Medical Association and the pharmaceutical industry continues to assert the primacy of this model in health care. Research based on this model receives the greatest share of funding.

Non-governmental organizations, most notably a variety of cancer prevention and treatment associations, have successfully lobbied governments and health care providers to introduce screening tests and preventive interventions – at times even before their effectiveness was established.

These biomedical interventions are widely marketed as effective methods for not only reducing risk, but also reducing the economic burden of disease. Thus this model remains the highly profitable bedrock of the so-called “medical industrial complex.”

BLAMING THE VICTIMS

At the other end of the spectrum, disease prevention has been seen as secondary to or even irrelevant to levels of health in society. In the 1970s, a health promotion ideology emerged advocating public education programs to encourage “healthy lifestyle choices.”

Health promotion policies were criticized for disregarding the broader social and environmental context of human behaviour and for overemphasizing

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personal responsibility for illness. Concerns were raised about a “victim-blaming” mentality that absolves society from its responsibility to the sick and needy. These policies have also arguably led to the establishment of health as the New Morality and thus paradoxically have contributed to the overmedicalization of society.

Failures in the first phase of health promotion led to a focus on social — determinants of health, and a stress on the importance of creating healthy living and working environments. The language of holism, community development, participation, and empowerment was added to the health promotion vocabulary. In 1987, national strategies to combat AIDS, heart disease, impaired driving and drug abuse were established.

But both variants of the health promotion agenda failed to reduce health inequalities because the messages and programs remained less effective among those most at risk: poor, immigrant, and aboriginal people. Health promotion discourse was vague, and allowed conservative policy-makers to undermine not only Medicare but even the health promotion agenda itself. For instance, in the 1990s the relatively low cost Active Living and ParticipACTION awareness programs justified shifting resources away from public fitness and sport programs.

The concept of empowerment was particularly paradoxical: Is it really possible for a bureaucrat to “empower” individuals or communities while continuing to set the agenda? The concept of empowerment was used to return responsibility for health to provincial and municipal governments, and eventually to individuals. This meant privatisation and downsizing of public health care.

A NECESSARY EVIL?

The most recent paradigm shift in Canadian health care took place in the early 1990s with the introduction of the “population health” perspective. Population health advocates identify prosperity as the most important determinant of health. However, structural inequalities are not seen to be the problem. Rather, the theory is that socio-economic gradients in health affect everyone and therefore the solutions should target everyone — “a rising tide lifting all boats.”

The population health model is highly complicated, involving numerous factors and feedback loops. The health care system is viewed as a necessary evil, and spending on it is just like spending on the military: “a regrettable use of resources.” Since a more wealthy society is a more healthy society, supposedly the most effective policy is to shift resources away from health care and toward economic development.

The new health morality thus involves an imperative to accept federal cuts to social spending and work hard in the service of corporate profits. The population health model turns out to be drawn from a neo-liberal market ideology.

HEALTH INEQUALITIES

The several turns in health care ideology over the past four decades have led to essentially the same policy outcomes. The major health policy proposals that followed the creation of Medicare in Canada have invariably assigned a prominent position to prevention, while calling for a reduced role for the health care system.

The slogan that prevention is better than cure was interpreted to mean that prevention is better than the illness-obsessed health care (or “sickness-care”) system. As a result, the arguments for prevention have been construed as arguments against Medicare. Adoption of both the health promotion and population health models in policy coincided with cuts to Medicare.

Clearly, universal access to health care has not eliminated inequalities in health. Indeed, there is evidence that health inequalities have actually increased following the introduction of market-oriented policies resulting in reduced public spending on health. This happened despite a 45% expansion in the dollar value of the Canadian economy over the past two decades. In fact, indiscriminate cuts to health care spending have disproportionately affected the poor because of their higher health needs and their inability to pay for private health care.

The new health promotion

and population health ideologies coincided with the rise of neo-conservative politics and neo-liberal economics in North America, along with a weakening of the labour union and women’s movements. Health care cuts have impacted the working conditions of the lowest paid health care workers, who are mostly women, and have shifted more responsibility for health care onto unpaid “informal” health providers, also mainly women.

The end result of the new policies has been a weakened, chronically underfunded and under-staffed Medicare system with eroded public support. This has opened the door to calls for privatization and deregulation. The medical profession has facilitated this trend by persistently refusing to take into consideration any health factors that cannot be addressed within hospital walls, and by advocating high tech care even when it is immensely expensive and minimally beneficial.

Clearly, erosion of the social welfare system and attacks on living standards can have disastrous effects on the health of the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society. Despite major advances in health technology and correspondingly huge profits for the medical-industrial complex, we are now seeing a resurgence of largely preventable diseases in Canada — including a number of diseases such as tuberculosis that were once thought to be eliminated.

This grim reality only reinforces the importance of defending the universal health care system. Now is the time to renew the old slogan, “Health care is a right!”★

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RECLAIMING THE LAND AT SIX NATIONS

Peace is in the people

BY KAHENTINETHA HORN

This article originally appeared on Mohawk Nation News May 27, 2006 and is reprinted with permission. As *New Socialist* went to press, the Six Nations occupation in Caledonia was continuing. Despite taking down their blockade on Highway 6, Six Nations negotiations with Ontario and the province's mediator, former premier David Peterson, remained stalled. Peterson in fact has demanded all other barricades come down and the occupation end, while the judge who issued the injunction against Six Nations (leading to the Ontario Provincial Police's failed attack on the occupation on April 20th) is demanding the OPP carry it out.

During the past 88 days of Six Nations activism to reclaim our land near Caledonia, we have received thousands of emails and calls from people all over the world. There were days when we just could not answer them. The support and ideas that we've received have been tremendously gratifying and helpful. We thank you all. Without this solidarity from natives and non-natives, the Ontario Provincial Police would have had their way. Blood would have been spilt. Never mind the return of our land, though we are still waiting on that one.

This solidarity that we are experiencing between natives and non-native people is a revival. The British promise to protect the Six Nations on the Haldimand Tract that our people are defending began with this solidarity. The Six Nations were allies of the British. It was this alliance that led to the formation of modern Canada. Because of this alliance we were pushed out of the Mohawk Valley in what is now New York

State where our people had lived since the beginning of time. The Mohawks were valiant allies of the British during the American Revolution. Mohawks have always been on the front line every time Britain needed defending – in the Battle of Queenston Heights 1813, in World I and World War II and other actions.

The Haldimand Tract is on traditional Rotino'shon:ni/Iroquois territory. It was guaranteed to the Mohawks in 1784. The Six Nations have always been willing to put ourselves on the line for our Canadian allies. It is gratifying to see that the majority of people support this alliance and are willing to stand up for us.

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT BETRAYAL

Our tradition has been to work together. Unfortunately, the Canadian government, particularly Indian Affairs, was taken over by people who did not want us to work together. They wanted to be boss, kings of the castle. So they betrayed us and the Canadian people.

Instead of treating us honourably like allies, they abused us. They stole our land and resources and schemed to kill us off. They pretended that we were children who could not look after ourselves. They depleted our trust funds with illegal investments in flaky financial schemes run by their friends.

Instead of treating us like allies, they pretended that we were British subjects. You may wonder why we did not protest over our lack of rights in Canada. That's because we aren't Canadians. We were minding our own business. We organized everything on our territory and paid for it ourselves.

We thought the problem was just the people in Indian Affairs and that our relationship with the Queen remained on an honourable footing. We were wrong.

The original Haldimand promise was that there was to be no encroachment ever. In the end the Canadian government, not the Canadian people, was the source of our beef.

Ontario, and the rest of Canada for that matter, is intent on diminishing Indigenous land holdings not only on the Haldimand Tract but everywhere. It is being diminished through outright theft. The aim of not giving one inch of land back is not for the benefit of the people of Ontario. It's to support the business interests that are intent on exploiting our resources with no regard to the environment or the present and future generations of the people who must live on it. It is the billionaires who really run the governments. Welcome to the pretend democracy of Canada.

We now assume stewardship over our illegally occupied lands. Until now we have invested a lot of resources into historical and legal research and actions for the last 200 years. Anytime the facts were put on the table, Canadian officials were shown to have mismanaged Canada and mistreated Indigenous people. We've borne the brunt of it. It is

Kahentinetha Horn is on the Elders Council in her community of Kahnawake. She has taught history of Indigenous women at Concordia. She currently runs the MNN Mohawk Nation News daily news service of what's going on in Kanion'ke:haka territory. She has almost 15 grandchildren. Horn has been retired for almost 16 years from Indian Affairs where she worked for 20 years and learned too much. She has a Masters in Canadian Studies from Carleton University.

over now! This rot also affects the Canadian people. They do not have a government that looks out for them and the future generations. That's the heart of the problem.

What is government and what are their functions? Is it a vehicle that allows a few greedy individuals to live parasitic lives off the work and possessions of others? Or should government bring people together so that we can put our minds together, solve problems and make a better life for everyone? The basic rift is between our Indigenous philosophy coming from our constitution, the Kaianereh'ko:wa/Great Law, and the philosophy of the people running the government. We've learned in dealing with the Canadian government that the Canadian government does not represent the Canadian people.

We never lost jurisdiction over our ancestral lands. We've had a deep sense of

maniac, Duncan Campbell Scott, of Indian Affairs. A lot of the early settlers on our land were Americans who had taken part in pushing us off our land in the Mohawk Valley. They came up here and liked what they saw here too and began squatting!

It's also interesting that a large percentage of Canadians consider that we got robbed and that we deserve our territories free of colonial jurisdiction. The public in Canada, the United States and worldwide have given Six Nations strong support. We hope, for the sake of Mother Earth, it is because many in Canada realize how important our philosophy of caring for the land is.

CORPORATE "PROGRESS"

Unless, of course, we are in the way of corporate "progress", that is, exploitation of our lands and resources by a few corporate interests. They operate with no obligations to anyone but themselves and

manipulate their "flag-waving" super-nationalists to make a lot of noise in the media and to attack us. This is what happened at the "Bread and Cheese Fight" in Caledonia on May 22nd 2006 when government instigated rioters came and tried to attack us. But the general public isn't buying it.

The main anti-Indian argument to stop Indigenous jurisdiction from being asserted is because they don't want us to grow, expand and become independent. Why do they think that expanded Indigenous jurisdictions would be disruptive? Would it be a problem if Indian affairs would no longer be getting a cut? They'd have to take their feet off their desks and do a day's work. Are they afraid that it would be environmentally and economically stimulating and rewarding not just for us but for everyone else?

NEED FOR UNITY

We all need to take a unified approach, native and non-native. We are all being abused. We need to work together. But we need to be wary of those who try to shut us up in the name of unity. We need to respect our laws and adhere to the original arrangements that were made between us. Let us assert our jurisdiction. Don't keep us mired in legalistic strategies which take up our time and money. We need to be free from the shackles of useless diversions.

Maybe what's needed is a massive "Condolence Ceremony" in which we wipe our eyes with a soft leather so that we can see clearly and have a good look at the issues; then we need to take an eagle feather to clean out our ears so that we can hear each other; and then we need to drink a glass of water so that we can speak truthfully and as clearly as the purest water. Sometimes the solutions to difficult problems are simple. Sometimes all that's needed is to show respect.

In the end, there's no need to give us back the Henco Industries land. It's ours already. It always was. All Ontario needs to do is to respect that. We need to assert the legal government-to-government relationship. We do have broad support from the public to do this. We must bring out the truth. We must stop Canada from continuing to live in sin. Grow up Canada! Colonialism is over! We're never going back!★



Six Nation activists at the land reclamation in Caledonia.

betrayal and anger over our horrific historic experience with the colonizers. Would giving us back our illegally occupied land be "too disruptive" to the parasites lodged in the Canadian government? Never mind that the government allowed and encouraged its own citizens to encroach on our land and gained private and institutional land titles in violation of the laws. They let Americans come up and take our land too! It's all part of their 100 year plan to get rid of the "Indian problem", as described by that complete

no concern for the people, native and non-native. We are all just pawns in their schemes. The way to overcome all this is to assert our title to Turtle Island and to turn it back to its proper role as a "cornucopia" for the people.

Even though there is wide support for us, there is tremendous opposition by the corporate interests which function through the governmental quagmire. They put pressure on any of their institutions that could give us justice. These interests manage to brainwash and

Inside the CAW jacket

BY BRUCE ALLEN

Perhaps no other event in the history of the Canadian Auto-workers (CAW) has evoked more of a reaction than the spectacle in December 2005 of CAW National President Buzz Hargrove gleefully giving then Prime Minister Paul Martin a CAW jacket to wear while Martin was campaigning for re-election. New Democratic Party (NDP) members and supporters were infuriated. The Liberals were ecstatic. The Left outside of the NDP cringed.

But “Jacketgate” is really misunderstood. It is misunderstood because it did not actually mark a sudden or dramatic shift in the political or class orientation of the CAW. The CAW’s right turn has actually been taking shape since shortly after the Ontario Days of Action (the series of mass protests from 1995 to 1999 against the Mike Harris Tory government, some of which included political strike action) were deliberately wound down after the leaders of the right-wing “pink paper” group of mostly private sector unions achieved supremacy in the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL).

ONTARIO 1999

The demise of the extra-parliamentary social movement that was mobilized during the Ontario Days of Action went hand in hand with a deliberate and general retreat by organized labour in Ontario, where the CAW’s membership is concentrated, into electoral politics. Defeating the province’s Tory government at the polls in 1999 became the sole objective of Ontario labour.

While there was unity with regard to the objective, there was disagreement over the electoral tactic for achieving it. Essentially two distinct tactics were pursued. One focused on exclusively supporting the NDP. The other focused on voting for those candidates most likely to defeat a Tory, meaning, in most cases, a Liberal (“strategic voting”). The CAW

made a decisive political turn to the right by embracing the latter tactic. This marked a sea change for the CAW, which had been a bulwark of support for the NDP since the party’s formation in 1961.

In 1995, the CAW leadership had punished the Ontario NDP for its anti-worker Social Contract legislation while continuing to support the NDP in the rest of English Canada. The CAW did this by adopting a policy in the 1995 Ontario provincial election of only supporting NDP candidates who defied the NDP government of Premier Bob Rae by openly opposing the Social

Contract. This meant the CAW adopted a political position decisively to the left of both the NDP and every other predominantly private sector union. This political orientation to the left of the NDP remained clearly in force for the next couple of years while the Days of Action were taking place.

Nonetheless, the planned demise of the Days of Action and the collapse of the movement associated with them facilitated the CAW’s subsequent right turn. It set the stage for the abandonment by the CAW of its tradition of unwavering support for the NDP in favour of “strategic voting.” Many CAW activists and local leaders opposed this right turn, wanting to remain loyal to the NDP. Others on the far left opposed it, seeing it as a clear opening to the Liberals and an abandonment of working-class politics.

These developments went hand in hand with an extensive survey of the CAW rank and file about the union’s



Buzz Hargrove welcomes Paul Martin on stage for an election speech to CAW members in Windsor (www.liberal.ca)

Bruce Allen is the Vice-President of CAW Local 199 in St. Catharines, Ontario. He founded the CAW Left Caucus.

The CAW's advocacy of what it claims is "social movement unionism" started to ring increasingly hollow.

involvement in politics. The leadership analyzed the results and concluded the CAW would be more politically effective if it focused its political work on key issues, rather than just on building support for the NDP. A new "non-partisan" political course could now be justified. This new course proved to be conducive to strategic voting becoming an entrenched CAW policy.

Beyond this, the collapse of the social movement, embodied in the Ontario Days of Action, set the stage for much more than just a measured degree of electoral support for the Liberals. It simultaneously led to a significant change in the way the CAW addressed issues that went along with strategic voting, and had similar political effects. Specifically, extra-parliamentary political action ceased to be a central feature of the CAW's mobilization around political issues. With this the CAW's advocacy of what it claims is "social movement unionism" started to ring increasingly hollow. More and more effort was channeled into lobbying politicians and timid postcard and letter writing campaigns. It was as if the CAW had disavowed militant mass protest and the politics of the street.

QUEBEC CITY 2001

Indeed, the final gasp of the CAW's commitment to the latter was vividly on display in Quebec City in April 2001 during the mass protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas. That was when most of organized labour turned its back on the youth who constituted the vanguard of the then thriving movement against capitalist globalization and who personify the future of the Left. During the two days of mass confrontation in Quebec City between riot police and these inspiring youth and their genuine allies, including some CAW activists and local leaders, the few prominent CAW members present largely stayed clear of the main events. They took part in the organized labour's hapless march to an empty parking lot on the outskirts of Quebec City instead.

On the same weekend, the large majority of the CAW leadership met at CAW Council far away in Port Elgin, Ontario (top CAW leaders had refused to move the meeting to Montreal in order to facilitate maximum participation in the

mobilizations in Quebec City). In retrospect, what happened that weekend in April 2001 was a telling indication of how much things had changed in the CAW after the demise of the Ontario Days of Action, and how much they stood in contrast to electrifying events like the occupation of the Oshawa Fabrication Plant during the 1996 CAW strike against GM, as well as the one day mass strike in Toronto as part of the Days of Action.

April 2001 revealed how much of a gap there now was between the CAW's occasionally militant rhetoric and practical reality. The chilling political fallout from 9/11 subsequently accentuated this marked shift away from militancy.

The new emphasis on political tactics like lobbying coupled with the embrace of strategic voting combined to give additional momentum to building a closer relationship with the Liberals. Lines of communication with the Liberals grew stronger. Bridges were being built between the CAW and the Liberals, especially under Paul Martin's federal government and Ontario's Liberal government, to the obvious pleasure of the Liberals, who are ever-eager to undercut labour support for the NDP. This, in large measure, set the stage for "Jacketgate."

But another critically important dynamic was at work with a very similar trajectory. The development of the auto and auto parts industry in Ontario within the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement and capitalist globalization prompted a significant shift in the relationship between the CAW and the auto corporations it collectively bargains with. Developments over the past decade and a half within this industry have led to a continuous downsizing of the workforce, especially at the "Big 3" auto company operations in Canada. Worse still, this downsizing of the CAW's auto

and auto parts workforce has occurred at the same time as non-union auto manufacturing operations at Toyota and Honda have expanded. This expansion has been prompted mainly by increased sales by these corporations and growing market share. This is resulting in the very ominous growth of a non-union workforce in the Canadian auto industry that directly threatens the future of pattern or industry-wide CAW collective agreements.

OSHAWA 2006

These developments have resulted in fierce competition for a diminishing number of jobs at GM, Ford and Daimler Chrysler, prompting those corporations to step up their pressure for both contract concessions by the CAW and massive government subsidies with the blessing of a CAW desperate to stop the relentless job losses. Confronted with this increasingly dire situation the CAW has become less and less adversarial in its relationship to these employers and more and more willing to accommodate their demands for more "flexible" collective agreements. Top CAW leaders are seemingly oblivious to the harsh impact of this on rank and file CAW members, the people who have to work under these flexible agreements and who experience daily the effects of the relentless restructuring of operations and the speed-up that flexible agreements (like the recently negotiated GM Oshawa "shelf agreement") are designed to facilitate.

The end result is yet another development that goes hand in hand with developing a closer relationship to the Liberals who are usually best positioned to deliver the government subsidies to these corporations in exchange for new investments. Such investments are also tied to the acceptance of local contract concessions that give the corporations more flexibility



Willie Lambert is challenging Buzz Hargrove for CAW President (www.willielambert.org)

in managing their workplaces and facilitating corresponding reductions in production costs at our members' expense. In effect, consent to a reorganization of the work process on the shop floor has coincided with a realignment of the CAW's political orientation, making for a broad realignment of the union's class orientation inside and outside the workplace.

In contrast to the Liberals, the NDP is largely left out in the cold. Being out of power, the NDP cannot deliver government subsidies, and can only be very useful to the CAW in the auto and auto parts industries if and when it holds the balance of power while a minority Liberal government is in office.

The CAW's subsequent break from the NDP cannot be fully understood without grasping these things. Indeed, the context they define also goes a long way towards explaining the CAW leadership's recent fury at the NDP over the federal party's decision late last year to not continue to prop up Paul Martin's federal Liberal government in order to extract legislation the CAW desired. This context also largely explains the depth of their current, deepened disillusionment with the NDP.

This begs the question of what can be done in the wake of the CAW's pre-determined decision, at a CAW Council

meeting in April, to terminate its relationship to the NDP and opt for a redoubling of its less-than-consistent support for its social movement partners as an ostensibly viable political alternative.

It is a political dead end to demand an unlikely, but not inconceivable, restoration of the CAW's relationship with the NDP. There is no reason at all to believe a restored relationship would be followed by a determined CAW effort to challenge both the NDP leadership and the increasingly right-wing drift of the NDP. The effective absence of any such effort throughout all the years the CAW was in the NDP precludes any credible hope that this would be attempted. Even if the current top leadership of the CAW was swept from power and its army of full time officers suddenly embraced anti-capitalist politics in a truly meaningful (as opposed to a rhetorical and momentary) way, the rightward drift of social democratic parties globally in the context of 21st century capitalism would doom an attempt to turn the NDP decisively to the left to failure.

POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE

Working towards the formation of a political alternative decisively to the left of the NDP is a more plausible option. But it has little support currently within the CAW. In the absence of more support this must be considered a distant goal. Nonetheless, ongoing advocacy of a political alternative to the left of the NDP is still critically necessary in order to methodically build support for its eventual formation.

In the meantime, there is a compelling need for an immediate political strategy which combines sustained attacks on continued CAW electoral support for the Liberals, and strategic voting with relentless demands that the CAW leadership return to an adversarial and meaningful anti-concessions stance towards employers, fully cognizant of how succumbing to corporate demands for flexibility is ultimately suicidal for a workers' organization.

Finally, the CAW leadership must also be relentlessly pressed to effectively practice what they are now preaching in relation to our social partners. They must be compelled to forge a renewed, sustained and consistent commitment to militant,

extra-parliamentary political action of the kind we saw during the Ontario Days of Action whose demise largely set the stage for the current, muddled political mess highlighted in December by "Jacketgate."★

For the first time in the history of the CAW there will be a contested election for CAW National President. Willie Lambert is running against Buzz Hargrove. Willie is a bus driver and CAW local leader in Oakville, Ontario, and the President of the Oakville & District Labour Council. He previously ran twice against Wayne Samuelson for President of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL). Willie has been an outspoken critic of many of Hargrove's policies and vigorously opposed the CAW's recent decision to withdraw all support for the NDP. He wants to see the CAW restore its relationship to both the NDP and the OFL and help to move both organizations to the left with a workers' agenda. Willie is a member of the revived CAW Left Caucus. His campaign has attracted a considerable amount of publicity and a growing degree of interest. The CAW hierarchy is not taking his candidacy lightly. Already votes have been engineered at meetings of many bodies within the CAW to endorse the re-election of Hargrove and other current top CAW officers. Clearly the CAW bureaucracy wants to rig the outcome before the votes for CAW National President are cast at the CAW Constitutional Convention scheduled for the week of August 14 in Vancouver. It knows there is considerable discontent with Hargrove at the base of the CAW that could surface in the secret ballot vote. The CAW bureaucracy no doubt remembers upstart Carol Wall's stunning result when she drew 37% of the delegate vote in the election for Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President last June in Montreal and put the future of Ken Georgetti as CLC President on thin ice.

ARGENTINA'S WORKER-RECOVERED ENTERPRISES MOVEMENT (ERT)

Reconstituting working lives

BY MARCELO VIETA

Over the past decade Argentina has witnessed the struggle of grassroots social justice groups against the encroachment of neoliberalism on everyday life. One of the most talked about groups has been the movement of worker-recovered enterprises (movimiento de empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores, or ERT). Emerging out of Argentina's recent socio-economic and -political turmoil, the ERT movement, which began tentatively circa 1998, surged in the months that followed the country's monetary, political, and economic crisis of Dec. 19/20 2001. In early 2006, it is still continuing to craft promising alternatives for the working lives of thousands of Argentines.

Argentine labour expert Héctor Palomino writes that the political and economic impacts of the ERT movement are more "related to its symbolic dimension" than the strength of its size since, to date, the movement involves roughly 170 to 180 mostly small- and medium-sized enterprises and between 8,000 and 12,000 workers (less than one percent of officially active participants in the urban-based economy). While this reflects only a fraction of the potential economic output of the country, the ERTs have inspired "new expectations for social change" in Argentina, showing innovative and viable alternatives to chronic unemployment and underemployment that move beyond the stagnant solutions offered by traditional state institutions and unions.

The impetus for workspace recuperations in Argentina has its political roots in the social mobilizations that began around 1996 with the movement of

unemployed workers (movimiento de trabajadores desocupados, or MTD) – popularly known as the piqueteros. By the mid-1990s, the radical liberalization of the national economy saw hundreds of multinationals take over Argentina's industrial base. Together with the chronic export deficit that ensued due to an overvalued peso, the government's extreme

*"Occupy, resist,
produce":*

*This slogan captures
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neoliberal policies relegated millions of workers to the ranks of the unemployed and the impoverished. But as Toni Negri observes, responses such as the MTD movement bore witness to a new "energy of universal conviction and of egalitarian social recomposition." Common to these early mobilizations by the growing and increasingly militant population of the unemployed was a renewed sense of collective purpose against a callous, exploitative, and socially alienating capitalist system, and a growing ethos of democracy from below. Since then, as Maristella Svampa and Sebastián Pereyra assert in a recent book on the experiences

of the newest social movements in Argentina, the country has seen a considerable "reactivation" of "communitarian social experience" that grew out of the calamitous socio-economic situation of the country throughout the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2000s.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

For many workers in Argentina, participation in direct action to recover their workspaces, driven by dire necessity and modelled after the new social transformations taking shape around them, seemed the only alternative. Gradually, through workers' struggles to recover workspaces and their subsequent practices of *autogestión* (self-management), ERT protagonists began to discover that it is possible to change their own circumstances despite a political system that remains unresponsive to their needs.

In workspaces spanning sectors as varied as education, printing and publishing, shipbuilding, oil refining, metallurgy, and tourism, workers' stories reveal similar struggles: after years of suffering under economic hardship, broken institutional promises, threat of or outright closure of firms due to legal or illegal bankruptcies, and the ineptitude and greed of business owners, workers were pushed into risky workspace takeovers, leading to long periods of round-the-clock occupation and resistance. Hence, the slogan adopted by the National Movement of Recovered Enterprises (Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas, or MNER), the autonomist ERT collective of roughly one-third of worker-recovered firms: "occupy, resist, produce." This slogan also captures the three distinctive stages of struggle that many ERTs must go through on their way towards *autogestión*.

Marcelo Vieta is a Ph.D candidate in Social and Political Thought at York University in Toronto. Vieta spent five weeks in Buenos Aires in the summer of 2005 interning with the worker-recovered printing house, Artes Gráficas Chilavert.

“OCCUPY...”

As business owners contemplate abandoning their firms, workers realize the possibility that machinery and inventory – and, thus, their jobs – will disappear, and that they will most likely never see wages, salaries, and benefits they are owed. Often with the help of supportive neighbours, sometimes by themselves, workers mobilize; they seize and occupy their workspaces to prevent the often illegal *vaciamento*, “emptying,” of the firm by returning owners, court trustees, or owner-hired thugs, using their own bodies as living blockades against the repression from police or thugs that could follow.

Next, militant workers begin the arduous task of lobbying local politicians and judges for formal recognition as worker-controlled cooperatives. At the same time, they begin production runs or offer services as quickly as possible so they can start earning a living once again. During these early days of militancy, ERT protagonists might even take their struggle to the streets or occupy local legislatures and courts as pressure tactics while their cases are being deliberated. MNER calls these tactics of occupation and protest “the war of bodies.”

“... RESIST...”

After the turmoil of the occupation, the resistance stage sets in as workers squat their reclaimed workspace for periods ranging from weeks to well over a year. During the early days of this period, when the risk of eviction is greatest, workers usually receive no income because they are not producing. They rely on families and neighbours to bring them bedding, food, and clothing. Workers may begin small production runs during the later stages of occupation, sometimes using the help of supportive neighbours to bring their products to market. More often, though, substantial production runs must wait until regional legislatures decide to grant the workers the right to operate as a cooperative and declare the *ley de expropiación* (expropriation law) on their behalf.

The expropriation law is vitally important to the movement because it prevents the auctioning off of the company’s assets or further repression while giving the workers’ cooperative control of the plant



Workers’
Cooperative of
Hotel Baven
protest for law of
appropriation
(www.flickr.com)

for up to 20 years. Eventually, but not always, the workers are allowed to legally use the machines under the auspices of a “temporary” law of expropriation that usually lasts two to five years while their request for the more permanent law is heard in regional legislatures. During the first months of operation, most ERTs continue to struggle under burdensome court-ordered conditions. In some unfortunate cases the workers are ordered to take on the debt of the previous owner or to rent back the firm’s assets from former owners or the state.

The seemingly straightforward goal of recovering jobs in Argentina, forged initially by necessity, is thus hampered by continuous material, legal, and political hardships for the ERT movement.

“...PRODUCE”

If all goes well with the occupation, the early months of production under self-management, and the first year or so of temporary control, then the process of worker recovery culminates in the workspace becoming an official, worker-run cooperative, fully controlled by its workers. The University of Buenos Aires’ ERT Documentation Centre reveals that most ERTs decide to become cooperatives, with over one-half practising pay equity under the democratic auspices of workers’ assemblies and councils. Other ERTs practise slightly more hierarchical forms of remuneration tied to specific skill sets, seniority, or whether or not workers were present during the initial moments of occupation.

According to Palomino, although the “egalitarian income structure prevails” with most ERTs, the issue of pay equity is the topic of continued discussion within

individual ERTs and across the movement as a whole. While not all ERT firms practice egalitarian salary schemes, the strong tendency amongst ERTs is to practise far more egalitarian forms of remuneration than when they were under the control of proprietors. Struggle, cooperation, and workers’ own sense of the communal value of their living and collective labour, not exploitative power hierarchies, tend to dictate the measure of worker compensation and reward in the ERT movement.

Additionally, most ERT cooperatives attempt to engage in production practices that aspire to minimize capitalist forms of surplus value and wealth accumulation. Where possible, ERT cooperatives try to distribute the major part of their revenues equally between workers’ salaries, the material needs of workers, and pensions for retired members of the cooperative. Most prefer to redirect any remaining revenue into the needs of production and the maintenance of the firm after these individual workers’ needs are met. Since ERTs tend to privilege workers’ necessities over capitalist accumulation and the profit motive, these practices of remuneration and revenue allocation can be seen as experiments in forms of work that move beyond some of the exploitative practices inherent in capital-labour social relations.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Because ERTs must compete within the greater capitalist economic form, they are constantly affected by the tensions that inevitably arise between the quotidian needs of workers and the production and marketing challenges of the firm. While each ERT’s daily struggles are differ-

ent, the most commonly shared challenges are underproduction, difficulties in reaching new markets, and the continued precarious life conditions of workers. Many ERT cooperatives operate with the constant awareness that revenues might not be sufficient to pay salaries, pushing them to begin to engage in less cooperativist, more capitalistic forms of management and production preoccupied with the maximization of revenue. These tensions tempt some ERTs to engage in practices of self-exploitation and self-bureaucratization, illustrating one of the contradictions implicit in self-management within a greater capitalist system: when staying afloat becomes the primary focus of a worker-run cooperative, workers risk losing sight of the collective spirit and democratic ideals that drove them to become a workers' cooperative in the first place.

When one considers ERTs' long periods of struggle for self-management, the technical and productive limitations they face due to the paucity of official outlets for loans or subsidies available to them, and the general lack of governmental and union support for the movement, it is not surprising that most ERTs produce at between 30 percent and 60 percent of their original output capacity, compared to production runs under owner management. As of the summer of 2005, only 12 percent of all ERTs operating for over three years under worker management were producing at more than 60 percent of capacity.

Most ERT cooperatives have had to resort to the individual and collective ingenuity and determination of its workers to ensure the ongoing operation of the firm. Worker-operators repair their own machines and mediate structural barriers to production by engaging in just-in-time or small-batch production practices, or requesting that customers pay for raw materials. ERT workers have also had to learn and share accounting and marketing skills and tasks. Many ERT workers are constantly developing new skills and capacities that remained untapped under owner control, showing not only alternative ways that labourers can re-skill and self-actualize themselves, but also pointing to ways of improving Argentina's national productivity and perhaps even cooperatively reconstituting labour processes in general.

Another response to these structural difficulties is the inter-ERT networks of solidarity and mutual assistance that are beginning to form. These alternative, social economic models include practices of inter-ERT support during workspace occupations and legal battles and, at times, sharing of customers, orders, prime materials, technological know-how, administrative duties, legal assistance, and even machinery and labour processes between ERTs. While these social economic networks remain underdeveloped, they show promise for assisting newer ERTs that are just starting to produce under self-management and for those firms that belong to more precarious economic sectors. They also begin to problematize the competitive business practices of capitalism.

WORK TO COMMUNITY SPACES

Jobs, machinery, and labour processes are not the only things recovered by ERTs; some ERTs engrain themselves in the communities and neighbourhoods that surround them; doubling as cultural and educational centres, community dining rooms and free medical clinics run by workers, neighbours, or volunteers. Worker-recovered print house Artes Gráficas Chilavert has a vibrant community centre called Chilavert Recupera (Chilavert Recovers), hosting plays, music concerts, and community events every Saturday night. Chilavert also converts its main shop floor into an art workshop on weekends. During one of my visits to the print shop over the summer of 2005, volunteers from the community were giving a class on the dying Buenos Aires signage art called *fileto*, while workers and visitors from the community played ping-pong in the cultural centre. IMPA, a mid-sized metallurgic cooperative located in Buenos Aires's western neighbourhood of Caballito, dedicates space to an art school, silkscreen shop and theatre. Artes Gráficas Patricios, in the economically depressed southern Buenos Aires neighbourhood of Barracas, houses a primary school and a medical clinic that is run by local community volunteers. Cefomar, a publishing cooperative in the historical neighbourhood of Monserrat, runs an early childhood education centre on its premises.

Hosting cultural and community

spaces is not just a way of giving back to the neighbourhood out of self-interest or corporate "goodwill." Instead, the cultural spaces within the worker-recovered enterprises are continuations of the neighbourhoods' needs. With many ERTs, workspace walls do not demarcate enclosures that protect the work inside from the community outside. Rather, recovered workspaces are deeply rooted in the needs of the local community since work life is an integral part of the economic and social life of the community. Argentina's ERT protagonists are recovering more than jobs, they are also returning workspaces to the neighbourhoods and communities that surround them by creating inventive ways of destroying the walls that divide work from the rest of life.

TOWARDS A NEW FUTURE?

For ERT protagonists, the politicization and reconstitution of their subjectivities from employees to self-managed workers and activists emerge slowly within their conjunctures of economic and political crisis. Their hope grows from creative and collective responses to their difficulties rather than from an enlightened vanguard; from below and within their moments of struggle. Cándido González, ERT activist and long-time Chilavert worker, eloquently articulates his own change in subjectivity:

"Now I know, looking back on our struggle three years on...where the change in me started, because it begins during your struggles. First, you fight for not being left out on the street with nothing. And then, suddenly, you see that you've formed a cooperative and you start getting involved in the struggle of other enterprises."

Out of socio-economic and -political crisis, Argentine workers in the ERT movement are beginning to show new and promising roads out of situations of exploitation, alienation, and immiseration not only for themselves but perhaps also for Argentina as a whole. Rather than fall prey to chronic situations of unemployment, poverty and despair, they are, through their emergent practices of self-management, deciding instead to reorganize their world around more humane, more socially aware, and more democratic forms of work and life.★

Will US attack Iran?

By HAMID SODEIFI

Recent reports, from a variety of well-connected sources in the US and internationally, point to the real possibility of a US attack against Iran. This comes as no surprise since Iran has always been the centrepiece of the Bush administration's Middle East policy. Moreover, while ostensibly pursuing "diplomatic" channels, the US has always kept the military option openly on the table.

The pretext for the recent escalation in tensions is Iran's nuclear technology and its Uranium enrichment program. Washington has warned that it will not tolerate a nuclear Iran because it fears that Iran will use its nuclear technology for military purposes.

But Iran's nuclear technology, as I will argue in this article, is merely a smoke-screen behind which lies the Bush administration's real intentions. To understand the situation, we need to have a broader perspective that goes beyond the current Iran-US standoff and looks at the region as a whole and the ambitions of George Bush and his gang of thugs in the White House.

First, however, let's deal with the issue of Iran's nuclear technology.

Contrary to media reports, which simply relay US State Department disinformation as facts, Iran has not violated its obligations under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Like any other signatory to NPT, Iran has the right to develop and employ nuclear technology for civilian use. The Iranian government has stated, time and again, that it has no intention of developing nuclear weapons and has given the inspectors of

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the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) intrusive access to its nuclear sites. As the physicist Gordon Prather has put it, "after two years of go-anywhere, see-anything inspections, [IAEA] has found no indication that any special nuclear materials or activities involving them are being—or have been—used in furtherance of military purpose."

Even if Iran were to begin developing nuclear arms, most analysts believe that it is at least about 10 years away from reaching that goal. Referring to the consensus estimates of the US intelligence agencies, the Washington Post recently reported that "Iran is about a

decade away from manufacturing the key ingredients for a nuclear weapon".

The warlords in the White House, however, have never been stopped by mere facts. They continue to insist, as Rumsfeld had put it prior to the invasion of Iraq, that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" and that Iran's intention is to develop nuclear weapons.

US ENERGY GOALS

It is hard to ignore the obvious similarities between Washington's claim now about Iran and that used before the invasion of Iraq regarding its supposed weapons of mass destruction which UN inspectors could not find anywhere. The

parallels with Iraq do not end here, however. The US administration has also charged Iran with supporting international terrorism and having ties to Al-Qaeda. In other words, the White House is recycling all the same lies it used in the lead up to its invasion and occupation of Iraq.

As with Iraq, US objectives in Iran have nothing to do with any potential threat posed by Iran either to its neighbours or the US. On the contrary, the only credible threat in the region comes from the US which has a bloody history of wars of aggression around the globe in the interest of its corporations, most recently in Afghanistan and Iran. So, why is the US government so focused on this region?

The policy of the Bush administration has been to use the unparalleled military superiority of the US to dominate the globe and thwart potential competitors (particularly EU and China) by wresting control of the global carbon fuel deposits. Aside from the political leverage that such control affords the US vis-à-vis its competitors and adversaries, there are also tremendous profits to be made. This is why the first major act of the Bush administration in office, and Cheney's first assignment as the US Vice President, was to pull together the major players in the energy sector in the US to develop a concrete action plan.

As I have argued in the pages of this magazine, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq had nothing to do with the attacks of September 11. The 9/11 attacks were used by the Bush administration to build support for its wars for control of the key centres of global carbon fuel deposits. Afghanistan was an important (and economical) pipeline route for moving the significant oil deposits of Central Asian countries to ports in Pakistan for global distribution. The invasion and occupation of Iraq was about taking control of one of the richest oil deposits in the world.

Since the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, US policy-makers have re-oriented their approach to the Middle East and its oil and gas supplies. Instead of depending on strong but ultimately unstable regimes, like that of the Shah, they have determined that they need to control the region directly. The Carter doctrine was

basically the articulation of this new approach. Since then, it has been the primary function of Centcom (US Central Command) to protect US oil interests in that part of the world.

Those who see the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq and now possibly Iran, as actions by the imperial guardian to merely force "rogue" nations into compliance with international norms fail to understand the importance of energy resources and the agenda of the neo-conservatives in the White House. Given the existence of numerous "rogue" nations around the world, why are they so fascinated with the "rogue" forces in this part of the globe? Why would their policy, long before September 11, focus so heavily on the Middle East as a prior-

*The only credible threat
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of aggression.*

ity area (I refer here not only to the Project for a New American Century report of 2000 but also its precursor, the 1992 Defence Policy Guidance)? Why would the opening shots of the New World Order, immediately after the collapse of USSR, be fired over the oil fields of Iraq? There is certainly something to be said about the enforcement of rules governing the global economy in favour of the imperialist nations of the North, resulting in systematic transfer of wealth and resources from the working classes of the South to the capitalists of the global north. But, at least in the case of the Middle East, that analysis needs to be augmented with considerations pertaining to energy deposits.

DOLLARS OR EUROS?

Another dimension to the conflict in the region is whether the global trade in oil and gas will continue to be denominated in dollars or change to Euros. One of Saddam Hussein's cardinal sins prior to his overthrow was to demand payment for oil exports in Euros instead of dollars. The control of the revenues generated by

oil (petro-dollars), and the fact that all importing nations need to maintain substantial amounts of dollar reserves for their petroleum purchase, has been critical to the US's financial dominance of the globe. It has also allowed it to operate as no other nation can by virtue of its dollar dominance. This is how the US can run such balance of trade and current account deficits without major repercussions for its economy. This is another reason the US will have to act against Iran. Starting this year, Iran will open its Euro-based oil stock market (Bourse). This will remove one of the key impediments to global trading of oil and gas in Euros, opening the door not only for Iran to sell its oil for Euros, but also for many other countries to do the same. The US will not simply stand by and watch this happen.

A MILITARY STRIKE?

Given all this, how likely is the threat of a military strike against Iran? Not very likely, at least in the short run.

There are significant divisions within the American ruling class and the capitalist class globally. Within the US, an influential group oppose a military strike against Iran. There are several reasons for this. First, they argue, quite rightly, that there is no such a thing as a limited military strike against a few suspected nuclear facilities. Any attack must also take out Iran's missile launching capabilities, its numerous air bases (military and commercial) and fighter planes, its communication networks and key government buildings in addition to suspected nuclear facilities. Many of Iran's nuclear development sites are 12-15 feet under concrete re-enforced ground. To effectively destroy these sites, the US will have to use its nuclear weapons. Not only will this cause the immediate death of tens of thousands of people, but the resultant radioactive dust will have a devastating effect on countries as far as India and China.

Also, contrary to the fanciful expectations of the neo-cons, the more sophisticated elements within US establishment dismiss the idea that a series of US strikes against Iran will lead to the down fall of the Islamic Republic and its replacement with a pro-US government. Indeed, one

See Iran: Page 38

Imperialism, neo-liberalism and “democracy” in the GLOBAL SOUTH

BY CHARLIE POST

In the past few years, there has been a marked shift to the left in Latin American politics. Alongside the re-emergence of militant direct action among urban workers, the unemployed and the rural landless, we have seen the election of governments led by left wing politicians in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Bolivia. These Left-led governments pose many issues for socialists. In particular, the renewed ability of the Left to use the electoral process was unthinkable in most of Latin America and the global south only twenty-five years ago.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, most societies in the “third world” were ruled by military or civilian dictatorships. Not only were representative legislative institutions lacking, but any and all attempts to form unions, peasant associations and other organizations of working people were brutally repressed. Dictatorships throughout the global south routinely jailed, tortured and murdered their opponents.

The imperialist powers—first of all the US, but also the Europeans, Japanese and Canadians—armed and supported these regimes. Most revolutionaries and radicals in that period believed that imperialist domination and capitalist rule in the periphery of the capitalist world economy required brutal repression of workers’ and popular organizations. Democracy, even of the most limited, liberal variety with contested elections, free press and free assembly, appeared to be incompatible with the needs of both foreign and domestic capitalists in the global south.

IMPERIALIST TURN TO DEMOCRACY

Today, the situation is very different. Since the late 1980s, pro-capitalist, parliamentary democracies have replaced military and civilian dictatorships in many parts of the global south. Mass struggles in South Africa, the Philippines, Indonesia and Brazil demanded free elections and democratic rights. While the US, Canadians and Europeans often maneuvered to bail out the military and civilian dictatorships until the last possible moment, the imperialist powers quickly embraced the new democratic regimes. In some cases, the imperialist powers have gone beyond accepting and encouraging pro-capitalist “democratic” forces. Through the auspices of the UN and NATO, the imperialist powers launched numerous “humanitarian interventions” (Haiti, the Balkans, East Timor) that have undermined dictatorial regimes and attempted to stabilize new capitalist democracies.

Clearly, the imperialist powers’ commitment to the most tepid forms of

capitalist parliamentary democracy is far from universal. In much of the Middle East and south Asia, the US, Canadians and Europeans continue to finance and support brutal dictatorships. The Pakistani, Saudi and Egyptian governments, despite their repression of even pro-capitalist opposition groups, continue to enjoy the support of the ruling classes of the global north. Nor are the imperialists willing to respect the results of democratic elections when they challenge their economic and political interests. The willingness of the US, Canadian and European regimes to support military coups in Venezuela and Haiti against democratically elected governments; and their removal of all aid to the elected Hamas government of Palestine illustrate the limits of imperialism’s commitment to democracy.

The imperialist powers’ abandonment of military and civilian dictatorships in Africa, Asia and Latin America has disoriented much of the Left radicalized in the 1960s and 1970s. On the one hand, a majority of former radicals and progressives have supported imperialist “humanitarian interventions” in the 1990s. Many former anti-war activists from the 1960s endorsed UN and NATO military adventures in Haiti, the Balkans and East Timor. On the other, a minority of anti-imperialists have adopted the attitude that the “enemy of my enemy is my friend,” defending dictatorial regimes against domestic movements for democratic reform. Some on the Left have rallied to defend Mugabe’s regime in Zimbabwe, which has routinely repressed independent unions and peasant organizations against the Movement for Democratic Change.

Why have the imperialists generally

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embraced parliamentary democracy as the preferred mode of capitalist rule in much of the global south? The answer lies in the economic and political restructuring of capitalism and imperialism, and the changed political situation since the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes after 1989.

LEAN PRODUCTION

At the heart of the restructuring of capitalism in the past two decades is the spread of lean production, a combination of speed-up, deskilling, technological innovation, outsourcing, privatization, etc., throughout the economies of the global north. This reorganization of production in the imperialist centers brought profound changes in the structure of capitalist production in the global south. Under the aegis of the giant transnational corporations, different regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America have been integrated into tightly synchronized, global production chains as the low-wage suppliers of parts and assembly labor. The final product often is assembled and sold in the more prosperous newly industrialized countries (Mexico, Brazil, South Korea, South Africa, etc.), or is re-exported to the imperialist countries. In other cases components alone are produced in various parts of the global south for assembly in the advanced countries. No matter what form the production chain takes, transnational capital requires freedom of movement and political stability to make this global system of lean production work.

Neoliberalism - the deregulation of capital, labor and commodity markets; and the imposition of fiscal austerity globally - is the political expression of the globalization of lean production since the 1980s. Whether instituted through free trade agreements or IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs (often implemented by military dictatorships in Chile and elsewhere in the 1970s and 1980s), the goals are the same - ending all restrictions on the free movement of transnational capital across borders, and creating the best possible environment for profitable capital accumulation. Together with "political stability" or the "rule of law" that ensures no disruptions in global capitalist produc-

tion chains, free trade is the order of the day for imperialism today.

THIRD WORLD DICTATORSHIPS

These new goals altered the US and other imperialist powers' relationship to various dictatorial and repressive regimes in the global south. Most of these regimes not only brutally suppressed working class and popular organizations, but used capitalist state institutions to promote capitalist economic development in the mid and late 20th century. Among the "statist" policies these dictatorships pursued were a variety of restrictions on foreign investment and imports, and the use of public funds to subsidize investment in national capitalist industries. In most cases, these national capitalists have been the direct products of the capitalist state - with the most important being state owned. Supporters of the ruling cliques in these dictatorships received preferential access to government loans and subsidies, promoting a system of crony capitalism across the global south.

The US and other imperialist powers

intervention in their regions. As a result, the US and the rest of the imperialist powers gladly armed these regimes for most of the late twentieth century.

IMPERIALISM POST '89

The global political situation has changed radically since 1989. Not only have we seen the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes in the east, but almost all of the mass anti-capitalist movements in the global south went into sharp decline through most of the 1990s. Whether based in the peasantry (the various national liberation movements and guerilla armies) or the rural and urban working class (COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) in South Africa and the PT (Workers' Party) and CUT (Central Workers' Union) in Brazil), third world anti-capitalist movements have either disappeared or have made their peace with capitalism and neo-liberalism around the world.

The absence of any serious mass anti-capitalist social movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America gave the US and

The expansion of freedom of the press, assembly and association, combined with the social crisis induced by neoliberal policies, has provided a fertile environment for the rebirth of mass anti-capitalist struggles.

tolerated the statist policies of these dictatorships in the global south because these regimes were crucial allies in the global struggle against anti-capitalist social movements during the Cold War. Although most of the anti-capitalist movements since the second world war were based in the peasantry and led by bureaucratic political currents (China, Vietnam, some of the Latin American guerilla groupings), they did pose a significant threat to capitalist stability in large sections of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The statist policies of these regimes were combined with a willingness both to use the most brutal and bloodthirsty repression against workers and peasants movements in their own countries, and to support imperialist

other imperialist powers more room to maneuver in relationship to their client regimes in the 1990s. The US and other imperialist powers no longer had to tolerate these regimes' statist economic policies. The imperialists increasingly threw their financial and political support to pro-capitalist opposition movements in the global south. Often based among those capitalists who provide component parts and sub-assembly services to the transnational corporations, these opposition currents wanted to end the use of state resources to subsidize state enterprises and businesses owned by supporters of the regime. Although unwilling to dismantle completely statist economic

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HAITI

A new phase of struggle

BY ISABEL McDONALD &
KABIR JOSHI

The recent Haitian elections, in which the poor majority of Haitians overcame massive fraud and repression to elect a President of their choosing - Rene Preval - open a new phase of Haitians' 200-year old struggle against racist imperialism.

Haiti won its independence from France in 1804 in a successful slave revolution, and managed to stave off powerful imperial armies of the day. However, France extorted 22 billion dollars from Haiti for the former colonial masters' loss of their property (which included the freed black slaves), and the US enforced a sixty-year-long embargo against the fledgling nation which helped to establish Haiti as the most impoverished country in the western hemisphere. Haiti remains the most singled out region for US intervention - the most notorious of which was the 1915-1942 occupation which restored a system of virtual slavery and left behind a brutal proxy army employed for years to come by a host of foreign supported dictators.

Haitians rose up again to expel the Nixon-financed dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986, in a grassroots political movement called Lavalas. This movement subsequently swept Haiti's first democratically elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, to power on December 16, 1990. However, within nine months, the populist Aristide government was overthrown by a CIA-backed military coup headed by General Raoul Cedras. Over the next few years, brutal oppression and rampant human rights violations by the Haitian army and a CIA-backed death squad resulted in the death of 4000-5000 Haitians.

The military junta also brought in



Rally in support of René Preval in Port-au-Prince.

large profits for nearly 60 multinationals, including Canadian businesses that increased their imports from Haiti during the ruthless Cedras years. International outrage and the flood of Haitian refugees seeking asylum in the US put enough pressure on the Clinton and Chretien administrations to reinstate Aristide on September 19, 1994. However, the grassroots movements had been crushed, with many of Aristide's supporters killed or "disappeared." The President's hands were now tightly bound by the neo-liberal regulations that the US imposed as a condition of his return. Nevertheless, Aristide completed his term, disbanding the notorious Haitian army and doubling the minimum wage. In early 1996, the first democratic transfer of power in Haiti's history took place with the election of Rene Garcia Preval, Aristide's former Prime Minister.

DESTABILIZATION OF HAITIAN DEMOCRACY

Constitutional law permitted Aristide

to run again in the 2000 elections, and he won with a 91% majority. Almost immediately the Haitian elite, working with the elite in the US, France and Canada, conspired to undermine the elected government. An economic embargo was immediately placed against the newly formed government, which withheld crucial funds for education, housing and water sanitation and resulted in untold suffering.

At the same time, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) funneled aid to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) - the very same NGOs that were tied to companies and wealthy individuals working in Haiti to destabilize the Aristide government. The role of this destabilization was to remove Aristide from power and systematically eliminate his huge political support to pave the way for the elite in the next election.

On January 31, 2003, the Canadian government hosted a round table secret meeting at Meech Lake code-named "the Ottawa initiative on Haiti". As Anthony

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Fenton pointed out recently in an article in Znet, invitees included high-level North American, European and Latin American diplomats such as OAS assistant secretary of state Luigi Einaudi, who had stated only weeks before that: "the real problem with Haiti is that the international community is so screwed up that they're actually letting Haitians run the place." Not a single Haitian representative was present. The conclusion was that Aristide had to go, the notorious Haitian army was to be re-banded and Haiti was to become a Kosovo-like protectorate of the United Nations. Furthermore, it was the Canadian Responsibility to Protect Document (the racist doctrine that legitimizes and legalizes imperial interventions under the guise of humanitarian assistance to "failed states") that was used to sanction the entire operation.

CANADA AND THE 2004 COUP

As Haitians celebrated the bi-centennial of their freedom from colonial domination, another terror group with links to the US government, stationed in the Dominican Republic, began a slow and murderous march towards Port-au-Prince -- armed with M-16s loaded with Canadian bullets. The armed group failed to capture the capital, however US Marines completed the coup by kidnapping Aristide and depositing him in the Central Republic of Africa while the Canadian Joint Task Force 2 secured the Haitian airport.

What followed was the dismantling of the entire government structure (some 7000 elected officials) and the foreign installation of the illegal government of Gerard LaTortue - a government that CARICOM, 52 nations of the African Union, the Black Caucus of the American Congress, Cuba and Venezuela all refused to recognize. Canada, however, helped draft the World Bank's neo-liberal plan for the LaTortue administration which included a reduction of the minimum wage and privatization of state owned companies and institutions. The document, known as the Interim Cooperation Framework, for which Canada donated 147 million dollar, stated that: "The transition period... provide[s] a window of opportunity for implementing economic governance reforms...that may be hard for a future government to undo."

Canada also helped to re-integrate the much-reviled former death squad soldiers from the disbanded Haitian Armed Forces into the Haitian National Police (HNP), and with the assistance of 100 RCMP officers, 25 police experts continue to train the HNP. In the aftermath of the coup, masked HNP officers conducted almost daily raids in the slums, assassinating and illegally arresting Aristide supporters.

The coup has meant huge profits for Canada's business elite. Canadian corporations have doubled imports from Haiti under the coup government. Gildan Activewear has recorded record profits; as its CEO, Glen Chamandy, proudly declared "... (Gildan's) labor costs in countries such as Haiti are actually cheaper than in China...." The ubiquitous SNC Lavalin is involved in numerous projects in Haiti. Canadian mining companies, including KWG and St. Genevieve Resources have negotiated and expanded contracts worth millions of dollars with the interim government. Teclist Inc., a Canadian engineering firm, obtained \$ 3.5 million in contracts and Canadian engineering and construction firm Genivar provided support structures for Haiti's corrupt justice system for a cost of 5 million dollars. For Haiti's poor majority, the coup has meant 10,000 dead, 20,000 in exile, 100,000 internal refugees, over 1000 political prisoners, and a suffering that cannot be quantified.

THE 2006 HAITIAN ELECTIONS

While heralded as the best Haitian election ever by Canada's Chief Elections Officer Jean Pierre Kingsley, the 2006 elections were held as over 1000 political prisoners languished in jail (over 90 percent of them without charges), Haiti's elected President remained in exile, and repression continued in the slums. In addition, the election's design made voting inaccessible for many Haitians in rural areas and in urban slums. The number of voting stations had been reduced from almost 12, 000 in the last Haitian election in 2000 to just over 800, and voting stations were completely eliminated in Haiti's largest slum, Cite Soleil.

Despite these abysmal conditions, a massive popular mobilization led to over 60 percent of registered voters turning out to cast ballots in the first round of the

elections on February 7. From the time of the first announcement of election results, it was clear that Preval had won over fifty percent of the vote. However, blatant fraud by the Haitian provisional electoral council (CEP), an institution created by the illegal LaTortue regime, sought to thwart Preval's victory.

Tens of thousands of unmarked ballots mysteriously turned up in the CEP's figures, inflating the total figure of votes, and the CEP counted them against Preval's percentage of the total vote. Thousands of burned ballots, many of them marked for Preval, were discovered in a dump in a Port-au-Prince shantytown. It was only as a result of massive popular protests that the CEP finally recognized Preval's victory as being 51.15 percent in what it termed a "political compromise."

The run-off election on April 21, which determined the composition of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, saw a much smaller turnout, arguably as a consequence of ongoing political repression that made it more difficult for candidates to campaign. European Union observers estimated that no more than 15 percent of the population participated. In addition, Preval's party Lespwa (which means "Hope" in Creole) did not secure a majority in either the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies, which means that Preval will have to form a coalition government.

In light of the US and Canadian governments' unrelenting push to straightjacket Haiti into a neoliberal model, longtime Haiti democracy activist Patrick Elie, in a recent interview in the San Francisco Bay Area Independent Media Center, argues that there will be a great need for grassroots organizations in Haiti to pressure Preval to represent the interests of the poor who elected him. Also critical will be the additional questions of whether grassroots mobilization in Haiti will succeed, and whether the main actors that undermined Haiti's last elected government -- such as the Canadian government -- will heed the calls of Haitian activists such as Elie to "work with the Haitian people and its elected leadership, rather than try, once again, to disrupt the country's progress."★

With files from Znet, Counterpunch, The Independent and the San Francisco Bay Area Independent Media Center.

Mexico at the brink

BY DICK ROMAN AND
EDUR VELASCO ARREGUI

The Mexican government has shown its bloody fist. On April 20, it sent a large contingent of paramilitary police to break a steelworkers' strike, killing two workers and wounding many. On May 3-4, police carried out an assault on the militant town of Atenco, killing one teenager, brutally beating and torturing many people, ransacking houses, raping women and arresting 200 with even more "disappeared."

These brutal shows of force – and likely more to come – are taking place at the same time as a very bitter presidential election campaign. The right-wing PAN (National Action Party) government is managing the election in the corrupt manner of the old one-party regime of the PRI. The right-wing PRI (Party of the Institutionalized Revolution) and the "centre-left" PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) have been decrying what they see as a fraud being planned for the presidential and congressional elections on July 2.

The PAN is the most right-wing of the three parties, both socially and economically. The authoritarian PRI ruled for over 70 years. Both the PRI and the PAN are stressing law and order and would continue the neoliberal destruction of Mexican society and economy. Neither have any commitment to democracy and human rights. After the assault on Atenco, the PRI's presidential candidate accused the PAN government of being too soft on rebels and the Zapatistas.



mexico.indymedia.org

PRD: HOPE FOR THE LEFT?

The PRD arose from a democratic electoral insurgency in 1988 with great popular support and energy. It has articulated a defence of democratic rights, nationalized industries and concern about growing inequality and poverty. Most of the Left and many social movements joined the PRD in the hope of building a left-wing alternative to the PAN and the PRI.

While many progressive sectors of the population had great hopes for the PRD, both the Left and insurgent social movements were marginalized or coopted by the former PRI leaders who dominated the PRD from the beginning. The PRD never became the democratic and left party that was hoped for by much of the Left. The authoritarian and opportunist

political culture of the old PRI as well as of some of the Left has made the PRD an arena of competing factions, leaving no room for democratic and popular participation. The PRD leadership views independent social and workers movements with suspicion. And the popular classes are viewed as voters and no more. The PRD has been careful to distance itself from insurgent movements, such as the Zapatistas and the people of Atenco. While the PRD presidential candidate, Andrés López Obrador, uses the slogan "For the benefit of all Mexicans...the Poor First," he is at great pains to reassure capital and the US and to distance himself from the Latin American Left.

The victory of either the PAN or the PRI will keep Mexico on its tragic path of neoliberal destruction, massive emigration and brutal repression. The victory of the PRD would open up more ambiguous possibilities. Certainly, the neoliberal direction of the economy would

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continue, although with certain limitations. But popular forces inside, around and outside the PRD would push for a deepening of democracy, workers' and trade union rights, defence of public ownership of natural resources (oil and power), and solidarity with the Latin American Left. López Obrador would seek to contain these demands and coopt leaders in order to reassure capital and renew Mexican economic growth.

ELECTION AND REPRESSION

In spite of his moderation, López Obrador is viewed by the Mexican Right, most of Mexican capital, and powerful forces in the US as a threat to US hegemony and neoliberalism. They are determined to prevent him from winning. Many observers feel that the election is already being cooked by the PAN.

This is where the very sharp escalation of state repression fits in. The repression (which goes beyond Atenco and the steelworkers' strike) has been concentrated in areas of either PRD support or strong opposition to neoliberal policies and the government. These are areas that would be most explosive if people felt, as many already do, that the election was stolen. These would also likely be areas of major resistance to the deepening of neoliberal attacks that would follow a PAN or PRI victory. The wave of repression is aimed at terrorizing and weakening areas of potential resistance while, at the same time, creating a climate of fear that will turn voters away from the PRD.

MOBILIZATIONS

There are two very important mobilizations taking place alongside the electoral campaign. The first is the campaign for union autonomy that developed after the government's heavy-handed removal of the leadership of the miners' and steelworkers' union.

This campaign has gained momentum and the support of democratic unions, semi-authoritarian unions, and even some of the old corrupt, state-linked and class-collaborationist unions. The coalition for union autonomy is a grab-bag of different elements, some defending autonomy for the purposes of maintaining union leaders' power and privileges, others for the sake of defending democratic unionism for workers. This coal-

ition held by far the largest May Day demonstration this year and is showing a strong capacity of mobilization. It staged a one-hour general strike and threatens an open-ended general strike if its demands for the restoration of the elected leadership of the miners' and steelworkers union and the dismissal of the Secretary of Labour are not met. While this is sheer bluff on the part of many of the leaders, it is tough talk and members are being mobilized.

The other significant mobilization is the "Other Campaign" (OC) of the Zapatistas.

The Zapatista leadership has engaged in a national tour of rallies and meetings in many parts of the country with the goal of developing a program and plan of struggle through listening and discussing. Subcommandante Marcos of the Zapatistas and other speakers have denounced all three parties and presidential candidates, reserving their most severe denunciations for López Obrador and the PRD. The character of the meetings has varied widely depending on the locations and the local organizers. In some cases, it has involved indigenous communities expressing their concerns and describing their struggles. In others, it involved an array of Left groups presenting their positions, with no space for audience participation.

The OC has had very uneven levels of support in different parts of the country. Its social composition is very different than that of the movement for union autonomy, being composed more of indigenous people, students, small far left groups, and the very, very poor. Its May Day march and rally was very spirited but by far the smallest of the three that took place in Mexico City (the third being that of the "official" union federation, the CTM).

The attack on Atenco has created a new and volatile situation. The OC put the rest of its tour on hold and, along with its allies, has organized a national campaign against repression that is planned to gradually escalate.

TWO SOLITUDES OF STRUGGLE

The campaign for union autonomy and the campaign against repression are fighting the same enemy, the capitalist class and state. But at present they repre-

sent two solitudes. There are no real linkages and a good deal of antagonism. While a unified struggle is essential to fight the repression happening now as well as the intensified neoliberal assault that would follow an electoral victory by the PAN or PRI, it would also be essential to withstand the coopting strategies that would follow a López Obrador victory, strategies that would attempt to turn independent movements into allies of the state once again, this time in an effort to give neoliberalism a human face.

Such unity would require important changes in both the workers' movement and the OC. Rank and file workers and the Left need to support the union autonomy movement while fighting to turn it into a movement for union democracy, autonomy and militancy. The limits of the contained mobilization by union oligarchs need to be challenged from within the union movement. At the same time, the Zapatistas and their allies have to take a more nuanced approach to working with forces with which they disagree. Had they participated in the May Day march and rally for union autonomy – instead of holding a separate march and rally – they could have electrified the rank and file in the crowd and raised an agenda that challenged the limited one of the leadership of the union autonomy movement.

The lack of legitimacy of all branches of government, the accumulated bitterness of years of neoliberal hardship, the likelihood of a very narrow and suspicious election outcome and the escalating repression make the post-election period likely to be very volatile as the Right and the capitalist class mobilize to destroy López Obrador or the people mobilize to fight back against a PAN electoral fraud.

Both the Zapatistas and the front against repression as well as the union movement for autonomy will face crucial choices about allies and strategy after the election. Political clarity and principled unity will be all the more important. Mexico has entered a very dangerous and fluid period. The Left, the democratic workers' movement and the "Other Campaign" have to develop strategies that are non-sectarian, nuanced, principled and combative at the same time. If not the prospects for Mexico are indeed grim. ★

Mass movement forces government climbdown

By MURRAY SMITH

After two months of a mass campaign against the CPE (First Employment Contract), on the morning of April 10 the French government finally caved in and withdrew the measure. The CPE would have enabled employers to sack young workers under the age of 26 in the first two years of their employment, without having to give a reason. Its defeat was the first time a mass movement had blocked one of the government's neoliberal measures since the Right came back to power in 2002. The government forced through a reform of pensions in 2003 in spite of months of demonstrations and strikes. The following year it imposed a reform of health insurance. Why did it fail this time?

In the first place, the CPE was aimed at a very specific part of the population, young people. And those young people who would have been directly affected, university and high school students, mobilized massively against it. There is a tradition of powerful student mobilizations in France, and this is not the first time one has been successful. In 1986 the government was forced to withdraw an education reform and in 1994 a measure similar to the CPE was defeated. Last year there was a four-month long movement of high school students, not always massive but very militant. The fact that there are regularly movements among students, sometimes national, sometimes just local, means that there is a frequently renewed layer of activists.

Secondly, there was broad unity against the CPE. The trade unions - all of them - supported the movement from start to finish. One reason for the defeat in 2003 was that one of the main unions, the CFDT, defected early on and accepted the government measure in exchange for insignificant concessions. It lost many members as a result. This time everyone stayed on board throughout the movement. Only a few months ago a measure similar to the CPE, the CNE, went through with little opposition. The CNE (New Employment Contract) allows employers in companies with less than 20 employees to sack workers in the first two

The support of the unions was a key factor in the victory ... but it was the youth who were the locomotive.

years of their employment without giving a reason. A day of strikes and mass demonstrations against the CNE last October 4 was not followed up and the measure went through. The workers most directly affected, those working in small companies, are poorly organised and in an unfavourable relationship of forces with their employers. Only a national campaign by the unions that mobilised stronger sectors could compensate for that, and it wasn't forthcoming.

STUDENT-LED PROTESTS

What was different this time was that the initiative did not come from the union leaderships but rather from the students. And the student mobilization steadily expanded. By the end of the movement three-quarters of universities were occupied or blockaded and over a quarter of high schools. It is worth noting that many of the most militant contingents of the high school movement came from schools in the suburbs which had seen the revolt of mainly immigrant youth last November.

The support of the unions was a key factor in the victory - there was throughout the movement a united front, the Intersyndicale, of eight trade union organisations and four student unions. But it was the youth who were the locomotive. The student unions were actively involved in the movement but its leadership was the Student Coordination, comprising representatives elected by mass meetings, which met every weekend in a different university and which was dominated by left-wing militants. The movement was supported by the entire French Left, from the reformist Socialist Party to revolutionary organizations like the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) and Lutte Ouvrière.

Thirdly, the demand for the withdrawal of the CPE had mass support. As people understood what was at stake, opposition to it rose to around 70 per cent of the population. And more and more of them were ready to take to the streets. The first day of action on February 7 mobilised 400,000 demonstrators. The next one a month later had a million, then 1.5 million on March 18, three million on March 28 and even more on April 4. Particularly on the last two days the

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number of those on strike was significant but not really massive – not as big as the largest strikes in 2003. And the experience three years ago demonstrated that a series of one-day strikes was not enough to make the government back down. This time the victory was brought about via the combination of massive protests and the fact that the higher education system was progressively paralysed. As the movement grew, university presidents called for the CPE to be withdrawn and splits developed in the governing UMP party, with Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, who had introduced the CPE, becoming more and more isolated.

NEOLIBERALISM NOT INEVITABLE

Underlying the whole movement is an ongoing refusal of French public opinion to accept the inevitability of neoliberal capitalism. In an editorial in its March 31 edition, the London-based *Economist* informed its readers, in a tone of exasperation, that only 36 per cent of French people thought the “free market” was the best possible economic system, as against around two-thirds of people in Britain, Germany and the US. This is a reflection of a deep-rooted attachment to the ideas of equality and solidarity among wide layers in French society.

The degree of resistance to the neoliberal agenda was demonstrated at the polls when the projected European Constitution was defeated in the referendum on May 29 last year after a dynamic

‘No’ campaign from the left. The activists who built the mass mobilisations earlier this year were often the same who campaigned against the European Constitution and were obviously encouraged from the recent victory.

Some politicians and commentators in France and abroad have argued it is “undemocratic” for mass protests to be able to over-rule the decisions of elected representatives, revealing a touching faith in France’s democratic institutions. It is worth recalling that the UMP, which thanks to the peculiarities of the French electoral system has an absolute and indeed substantial majority in Parliament, won just 33 per cent of the vote in the 2002 elections - a figure that goes down to 22 per cent of registered voters when you take into account the 35 per cent of electors who abstained. Representatives elected under those conditions and subject to no kind of control or recall by their electors are ill placed to give lessons in democracy.

The victory over the CPE has left an arrogant right-wing government in disarray a year before next year’s presidential and legislative elections. Calls for De Villepin’s resignation are mounting and he is becoming mired in the Clearstream scandal, where it appears that there was an elaborate conspiracy to smear leading politicians, including the main right-wing contender (and De Villepin’s rival) for next year’s presidential elections, Nicolas Sarkozy, with accusations of corruption.

The victory over the CPE is worth celebrating, but there is no room for triumphalism. In spite of often widespread opposition to their policies, successive governments of the Right and Left over the past fifteen years have been steadily pushing forward the neoliberal agenda – privatisations, labour flexibility, counter-reforms in health, pensions, education and environmental standards. Periodically mass mobilisations slow the process or block particular measures but they do not stop it – and sometimes even massive mobilisations are defeated, as in 2003. The union leaderships bear considerable responsibility for defeats. In 2003 in particular, it was their refusal to call an all-out general strike that gave victory to the government. The experience of 2003 has made many workers sceptical about the utility of repeated days of action and if opposition to the CPE had been limited to that, victory would have been unlikely. What made the difference was the permanent mass mobilisation of the students.

Unfortunately, France still lacks a credible political alternative. A defeat of the Right in the 2007 presidential and legislative elections is possible, though not certain. As has been repeatedly shown over the last 25 years, however, a return to power by the Socialist Party would not mean the end of neoliberal policies. That presents the anti-capitalist Left with a challenge. It has to move from campaigns and even victories on single issues to providing a political alternative. Following on the victories over the European Constitution and the CPE, the next step could be united candidacies of the forces to the left of the Socialist Party in next year’s elections. Both the Communist Party and the LCR have come out in favour of such candidacies. The basis of such unification could be a programme that breaks with the left-right neoliberal consensus and a refusal to participate in an SP-led government – a point on which the Communist Party still has to clarify its position. If the obstacles can be overcome and agreement reached, a united campaign could begin to give direct political expression to the widespread rejection of neoliberalism and mobilise many activists from the social movements. ★



Students block rail traffic at the Gare de Lyon, Paris on March 30, 2006.

Immigrant rights in the US

By BRIAN KWOPA

The demonstrations, walk-outs, boycotts, marches, work-stoppages, and protests of the past few weeks are more than just an inspiring example of resistance to reactionary government legislation; they may signal the birth of a new left. In response to the ominous portend of an immigration bill so extreme that it alienated the Catholic church, millions of people have participated in recent weeks in the beginnings of a mass movement for immigrant rights. Far from just a flash in the pan, this movement will have long-reaching effects on the balance of class and political forces in the US, so as leftists we have to wrap our heads around it.

CAUSING A BACKLASH?

Sensenbrenner's bill is only the sharpest edge of a brazen and arrogant Republican party, who (thanks to the good will of the Democrats) have gotten away with the invasion and occupation of Iraq, exposure of an international archipelago of torture camps, multiple high-level corruption scandals, criminal negligence of Hurricane Katrina's victims, vast expansion of powers for the surveillance-industrial complex, two fresh far-right "judges" for the supreme court, and on and on.

If the Democrats' response to all of this has been predominantly collaborative, the response of the broader left hasn't been much better. The antiwar movement has been anemic for months, with no national demonstration on the 3rd anniversary of the invasion of Iraq and continued marginalization of Arabs, Muslims, and Palestine in the politics of the movement. South Dakota's abortion ban has been met with stultifying silence and demobilization from liberal feminist organizations. Widespread outrage at

Hurricane Katrina's exposure of the depth of poverty and racism in America found no expression in a national movement around justice for Katrina survivors. And on and on.

Unfortunate as these failings of the left may be, they're rooted in our historical circumstances. The American elite have been on the offensive for the last 30 years in an effort to roll back the social and political gains of the social movements of the 60s and 70s and to repair the relative economic damage to the US economy wrought by the Vietnam war. Attacks on wages and living standards, rollbacks of civil rights, diminished access to health care, chipping away at abortion rights, and the era of NAFTA-style "free trade" programs for US-based transnational corporations have all come at the expense of one or another sector of the working population in this country.

No surprise then that at some point people would push back; especially with the mass revolts against the effects of neoliberalism taking root in so many

other parts the world, North and South from Bolivia to France. The beginnings of that revolt have now come home, in part because the radical labour experiences that immigrant communities often bring with them. Although we couldn't have predicted our revolt would come from immigrant workers, it makes sense. Which is why the liberal argument that cautions a "backlash" is so ridiculous: the mass movement for immigrant rights IS the backlash. And hopefully only the beginnings of it.

HISTORICAL TURNING POINT?

The fault lines in US politics are shifting. On May Day, up to 700,000 people marched in Chicago. Over a million marched in Los Angeles, 75,000 people in Denver—about one-sixth of the city's population—all participated in a march on the state capitol. In New York City, over 100,000 (following 300,000 two days earlier for a march against the war in Iraq). 72,000 students (around one in four) walked out of classes in the LA school district alone. Untold millions participated in a boycott of buying and selling anything. Across the country, businesses that rely on immigrant labor were forced to scale back or close down completely, including major food

The fault lines in US politics are shifting.

production and processing corporations like Cargill. Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, truckers stayed away from the country's largest shipping port, and an estimated one-third of the city's small businesses were shuttered.

May Day 2006 was the biggest and most inspiring resurgence of labour (and civil rights) militancy that this country has seen in a generation. More generally, the immigrant rights movement holds the possibility of reviving a vibrant left in the US of the kind that we haven't had since the 1960s.

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Immigrant rights
May Day rally in
San Francisco,
2006

THE NEW CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The civil rights movement of the 1960s was a turning point in US history. Starting more or less in the mid 1950s with *Brown v. Board*, Emmett Till, and Rosa Parks, and continuing for nearly the next two decades, the civil rights movement inspired the beginnings of a resurgence in political activism on a massive scale in the US. It ripped open the straight jacket of McCarthyism, creating political space and inspiration for the student movement and the movement against the Vietnam war, which in turn inspired the feminist movement and the gay liberation movement, which then gave rise to later environmental and anti-nuclear movements. In short, it marked the birth of a new left.

Like the last civil rights movement, the immigrant rights movement can revive the US left of today – it can initiate a period of wider and wider resistance to Jim Crow-level segregation and racism (against migrant workers), rejection of imperialist war half way around the world, reversing the attacks on women's rights, and so on. But there is one key difference: the struggle this time includes massive working-class and labor-based action, which was

basically the main ingredient missing from “the fire last time.”

Because the immigrant rights movement is so predominantly working-class, it can provide an even wider basis for struggle around key political questions. For example, it can be linked to the struggle against the war in Iraq, whose victims (Iraqi and American alike) are predominantly working-class, and thrust into combat because of the economic and military consequences of the US-dominated world order. It can also be linked to the struggle for reproductive rights, whose beneficiaries are predominantly poor and working-class women, particularly Latinas (among other minorities). It can be linked to the African-American struggle for justice on the basis of unity against racism and resistance to prison-industrial-complex-style militarization, which attempts to control both populations. If the immigrant rights movement is also indeed a revolt against the effects of “free trade” NAFTA-style policies, then it could conceivably develop into a struggle against corporate globalization and neoliberalism itself-in the primary offending country, for that matter.

Significantly, these ideas are not lost on

the migrant workers in the streets. In LA, for example, despite the media's focus on flag-wavers to the exclusion of political messages, there were home-made signs saying “Are our troops in Iraq illegal too?” and “Your Foreign Policy Brought Me Here.” If those workers don't represent the inspiring potential for a radical challenge to neoliberalism and imperialism inside the movement, we'd have to be politically impotent. Or Democratic Party enthusiasts.

The masses of undocumented workers in the streets can lead the revival of a new left, and one that is even broader and more labour-radical than what came out of this country in the 1960s. For the first time in decades, millions of people celebrated May Day in the US, for heaven's sake! Of course the political, economic, and social conditions today are very different from 40 years ago. For example, global warming now threatens life as we know it, so the stakes are far higher. But the immigrant workers movement taking to the streets has shown that the once-in-a-long-time opportunity for transformative change is returning. We need to throw ourselves into it with all the energy we can muster. ★

24 hours of torture

TV: 24

REVIEW BY
JACKIE ESMONDE

The graphic images of torture by U.S. military personnel at the Abu Graihb prison in Iraq were a horrifying confirmation of the widespread use of torture in the war. The obvious enjoyment on the faces of the torturers as they posed and smiled for the camera contributed to the unsettling nature of the photographs.

This torture for pleasure was clearly not the face that the Bush administration wished to put forward to the world. Although the US government publicly condemned these abuses and claims to have held more than 250 people “accountable” for what took place at Abu Graihb, it has refused to back away completely from the use of torture. Instead, the Bush administration has publicly justified its use of torture as a grim but necessary task to make the world a safer place.

You could be excused for having thought that there was no debate to be had about the use of torture. After all, the United Nations Convention Against Torture, created in 1984, makes the use of torture in any circumstances a violation of international law. It also outlaws “cruel and unusual treatment.” The United States Senate ratified the Convention in 1994. Canada is also a signatory.

However, in the years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing wars in the Middle East, the use

FIRST LADY: Will he hurt him [the President]?

WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF, MIKE NOVICK: Jack Bauer will do whatever it takes to compel your husband to confess the truth. He is the only one I know who can do this.

From Episode 24, Season 5 of TV's 24

of torture has increasingly become a topic for public debate. Although the extent of the use of torture by the US government is unknown, the Bush administration has publicly argued that the use of torture is not only legal, but justified. For example, the US has argued “torture” only applies to acts that result in “organ failure or death.”

While the emerging evidence of the US government’s use of torture and its attempts to justify its use have sparked international debate and condemnation, in the world of popular culture, the use of torture against terrorists is not only common-place, it is often carried out with no significant questioning of the practice on either moral or legal grounds. For example, Sydney Bristow, the CIA agent heroine of TV’s *Alias*, regularly murders “terrorists” while operating covertly in countries throughout the world.

By far the most noteworthy in this television trend is the Fox network’s *24*, a television series that is nothing less than a pop cultural justification for the methods of the United States in its war on terror.

JACK BAUER AND OTHE “TICKING BOMB”

The hero of *24* is Jack Bauer. Played by Kiefer Sutherland, Bauer is a high ranking agent in the Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU), a fictional agency within the US government that deals with domestic terrorism threats. The shows gimmick is

that it takes place in “real time” over the course of 24 hours. A clock ticking by the seconds regularly flashes across the screen as Jack Bauer and his colleagues deal with an extreme terrorist threat on US soil over the course of one day. The constant references to time reinforce the urgency to act (eg. the terrorists will set off nerve gas in 15 minutes if we don’t stop them, etc.).

As his superiors in command well know, Jack Bauer will break any rule in order to stop a terrorist threat. He regularly engages in torture. Over the course of five seasons, Bauer has shot a suspect in the leg while interrogating him; subjected the son of the defense secretary to high-tech sensory disorientation; stunned a suspected but innocent colleague; and used a lamp cord to shock information from a businessman. In this season’s finale, Bauer kidnapped the president of the United States and threatened to kill the president if he did not confess to his wrong-doing.

A frequently cited justification for the use of torture is the “ticking bomb” scenario, a scenario in which a major terrorist atrocity could be prevented by using torture to extract information from someone with the knowledge necessary to stop the threat. Canada’s own Prime Ministerial hopeful, Michael Ignatieff, recently published an article in Britain’s *Prospect* purporting to oppose the use of torture while actually arguing the opposite. Says Ignatieff, torture obviously works or it would not be used so often. He

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Jack Bauer defending our freedoms - by any means necessary.

argues that prohibiting torture completely will inevitably allow some “interrogation suspects” to resist divulging information that is necessary to save lives. Ignatieff says he can live with that cost, but he muses that “the majority of fellow citizens is unlikely to concur.”

Joel Surnow, an executive producer for *24* explicitly acknowledged his intent to justify the use of torture. In an interview for the *Washington Times*, Surnow told the paper that “If there’s a bomb about to hit a major US city and you have a person with information... if you don’t torture that person, that would be one of the most immoral acts you could imagine.”

However, the “ticking bomb” justification is based on the false premise that torture is effective in obtaining reliable information. Information extracted through torture has repeatedly been shown to be unreliable, as “sources” are induced to say whatever they think is most likely to stop the pain. Moreover, a scenario in which it is known with certainty that a bomb threat is imminent and that a particular person is not only available for questioning and has the precise information needed to stop the threat is pure fantasy. Despite what may be shown on *24*, torture does not work.

DE-POLITICIZING TERRORISM

Each season of *24* has featured a different terrorist threat. The “terrorists” have been a Kosovar family, an Arab terrorist cell called “Second Wave”, a Mexican

crime family, a sleeper cell of middle-class Turkish immigrants, and “Russian separatists.”

These “terrorists”, as they are frequently called on *24*, are completely removed from any political context. Their political motivations are murky at best; they appear to follow only a personal agenda. However, the terrorist threats we face today did not come out of nowhere and cannot be reduced solely to individual pathology. For example, the network of cells associated with Al Qaeda emerged out of legitimate anger and frustration with the imperialist actions of Western governments in the Middle East over the course of at least the last sixty years. By propping up corrupt dictatorships in various Middle Eastern countries, the United States contributed to the crushing of opposition groups. The strongest oppositional forces that have survived have organized themselves around a particular form of Islam. In fact, the United States historically supported many Islamic groups that it now places on its terror lists.

Without this political, economic and historical context it is easier to argue simplistically, as *24* does, that stopping terrorism is about getting the right intelligence (through torture) and using violence to stop terrorists. A more nuanced understanding of global politics suggests that the use of force to fight terrorism will only increase the likelihood of future terrorist attacks and will simply continue a spiralling cycle of death and violence.

GETTING USED TO TORTURE

24’s justification of torture is not a frivolous matter to be dismissed. *24* is an extremely popular show, watched by millions of viewers. The show’s consistent portrayal of torture as necessary and effective accustoms viewers to its use. Jack Bauer is never disciplined for his actions. In fact, he earns the grudging respect of those around him – including the “terrorists”. The complete failure to even acknowledge that torture is a violation of international law assists in getting viewers used to the idea of torture as a legitimate option in the war on terror.

It is easier for viewers to accept the legitimacy of torture when it appears so painless and short-term in effect. The utterly shallow treatment of the causes of terrorism, and the portrayal of terrorists as non-European immigrants within US borders can only contribute to racism, xenophobia and the equation of migration with terrorism.

International laws such as the Convention Against Torture and the Geneva Convention are strongly worded defences of the human rights of prisoners. It is true that in practice, these instruments have been enforced only against weaker countries for the benefit of the strong. Notwithstanding the lack of teeth in these documents, the United States has begun an aggressive attempt to push the boundaries of international law to justify its practices. The Bush administration has introduced the concept of a “humanitarian war” (i.e. to bring democracy) and characterized “prisoners of war” as “enemy combatants” thereby avoiding the requirements of the Geneva Convention. Now, with US attempts to create an opening for the permissible use of torture, we are witnessing nothing less than the reworking of the rules of war.

More important than convincing the international community, the US government must garner the support of its own citizens. By normalizing torture and by portraying terrorist threats on American soil by “foreigners” as constantly possible and imminent, television shows like *24* assist in this expansion of state power. ★

IRAN

Continued from Page 25

of the biggest problems for the US is that there is no viable pro-US force in Iran to compete for power. Consequently, ruling class opponents of Bush's plans argue that the US needs to acknowledge the failure of its 25 year sanctions policy and, instead, begin a process of limited re-engagement with Iran. This policy will give US corporations access to Iranian markets and resources and, in the long run, put the US in a better position to press Iran to comply with its demands. There will also be a period of time in which the US can redevelop internal allies and military intelligence should it need to consider a military engagement.

Globally, there is very little appetite for another US led invasion while the fiasco in Iraq continues. Even the British dogs don't seem all that keen to follow their masters into Iran. The rest of the European Union insists on finding a

negotiated solution, and Russia, increasingly uncomfortable with US actions in the region, has firmly stated its opposition to a US military attack against Iran.

But, perhaps most importantly, Iran is a significantly more powerful nation than Iraq was after a decade of crippling US sanctions. As well, Iran has considerable influence on the Shiite majority in Iraq, the Hezbollah in Lebanon and factions in Afghanistan. An attack on Iran could result in what is described as asymmetrical retaliation by its supporters in these areas. This could spell disaster for the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, draw in Israel into a wider regional conflict, and lead to either a major human catastrophe if the US and Israel employ their nuclear weapons, or revolt and revolutions against US puppets in the region. Globally, a major hike in the price of oil, as a result of either an attack on Iran or Iranian disruption to flow of oil in the Persian Gulf, will send the global economy into a potentially severe recession.

The outcome of an attack on Iran, whichever way viewed, is disastrous. In short, the military option is extremely risky.

On the other hand, unless Iran is brought into the US orbit of influence, the Bush administration's plans to dominate the global capitalist system through control of energy resources will be severely curtailed. Iran has already signed major oil and gas treaties with China, India and Pakistan and is exploring a closer working relationship with Russia to supply Western Europe with natural gas. There are also agreements for oil swapping between Iran and some of the Caspian region nations. These types of deals and arrangements and Iran's Euro-based stock exchange leave the US with little option but to exercise its ultimate trump card. So, while the possibility of a military attack is limited by its significant hazards, it cannot be completely ruled out, especially while Bush and his gang of war criminals are in charge. ★

IMPERIALISM

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institutions, these opposition movements' programs are much more in tune with that of global capital than the old dictatorships. While such movements in the Philippines, South Africa, Indonesia and elsewhere were democratic, wanting to establish the rudiments of capitalist representative government and basic political liberties, they were not in any way anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist.

The growing tension between the US and the other imperialist powers and their former client regimes became acute when the dictatorships launched repressive operations against their own populations or went to war with neighboring regimes. The "humanitarian interventions" of the 1990s were the logical result of the changed economic and political situation. Mass repression and warfare created instability that imperialism was no longer compelled to tolerate in most of the global south.

In the past few years, we are seeing the limits of pro-neo-liberal capitalist democratization in the global south. As Marx argued in the *Communist Manifesto*, "the

first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy." Put simply, the development of democratic openings under capitalism creates the space for the growth of independent working class and popular organizations. The imperialists' hoped to replicate the liberal, parliamentary democracy of the global north in the global south - a political system where the population gets to choose between different pro-capitalist alternatives every two to four years. However, the expansion of freedom of the press, assembly and association, combined with the social crisis induced by neo-liberal policies, has provided a fertile environment for the rebirth of mass anti-capitalist struggles.

Nowhere is this more evident than Latin America. Over the past four years, mass struggles of workers and other popular forces against neo-liberalism have swept across Latin America, overthrowing pro-imperialist regimes in Bolivia and Argentina. Even in occupied Iraq, the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein dictatorship has created the space for mass mobilization and organization - of both unions and religious-led military and

political opposition to the US/UK occupation.

Whether or not the imperialist powers will maintain their commitment to parliamentary democracy in the global South will depend on the independence and radicalism of these mass movements. If the newly elected left governments in Bolivia and Argentina follow the path of the PT (Workers' Party) in Brazil and the ANC (African National Congress) in South Africa and demobilize the mass movements and follow the neoliberal dictates of the IMF and World Bank, liberal capitalist democracy will survive. However, if these left governments challenge neoliberalism through nationalizations and other forms of statist economic policies or cannot contain the mass movement, the imperialists may well revert to their traditional allies in the military and civilian bureaucracies. At that point, the ability of the mass movements to continue to mobilize independently of — and possibly in opposition to — the Left governments, will determine whether or not a new, more radical workers' and popular democracy will emerge or the older capitalist dictatorships will again become the norm in the global South. ★

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