

EDITORIAL

Against the long war

STEPHEN HARPER SAYS MILITARY SACRIFICES IN AFGHANISTAN are necessary to ensure Canada a prominent place in world affairs. In other words, ever-growing militarization is necessary to defend what apologists for war and empire have the gall to describe as the “civilized world.”

The claim that Canadian soldiers are on a humanitarian mission to spread democracy and women’s rights is a lie. The US military’s record of bombing civilians, arbitrary detention, torture and murder in Afghanistan is clear. The role of the US-led NATO force of which Canadian troops are a part is to prop up the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan under Hamid Karzai, the president installed by the US occupiers in 2001 after they had backed the warlords of the Northern Alliance to topple the Taliban government.

In the words of the Afghan feminist group RAWA, the US “replaced one fundamentalist regime with another.” The Karzai government has even revived the Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice to enforce religious morality, threatening dissent and the rights of women and girls to education, health care and paid work.

During Karzai’s visit to Canada last fall, the corporate media in Canada failed to report what everyone in Afghanistan knows: Karzai is a US puppet. His government is full of reactionary religious figures and corrupt warlords (armed and trained by the US in the 1980s to fight the military of the USSR during its occupation of the country). Many are responsible for killing thousands during the civil war of the early 1990s, when they also imposed ultra-conservative religious law.

None of this matters to Bush, Blair and Harper. What they want is a “stable” Afghanistan.

The country matters to them because it is close to the strategically-important Caspian Sea region, the site of huge untapped resources of natural gas and oil. The US wants to control Central Asia, countering Russian and Chinese influence. If NATO troops can impose “stability” in Afghanistan, then corporations, including Canadian firms, can move in and profit from pipeline construction and other investments.

But stability for Western capital seems unlikely. The brutality of the US-led occupation is fuelling a growing resistance. Canadian generals are trying to prepare us for a long war, and the government may try to extend the Canadian military presence beyond its scheduled end in 2009.

The situation in Afghanistan is not at all unique. The spreading tentacles of global capitalism generate resistance, which is often met with campaigns of violent counter-insurgency. Military repression is a long term necessity of imperialism.

Canada, as a secondary imperialist power, has sometimes focused on the diplomatic rather than the military front. This has contributed to widely-held illusions at home and abroad

about Canada’s role as a peacekeeper.

But Canada has a tried and true history of complicity with US imperialism, from Vietnam to Iraq. Canada is the world’s seventh largest arms exporter, helping supply the bullets and machinery of death for US forces in Iraq. Canada’s military is being enlarged, upgraded and made increasingly interoperable with US and NATO command so it can more easily be deployed in other “hot spots” around the globe.

At the moment, mobilizing to demand the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan is a central political task. Pan-Canadian actions on October 28th were a step forward in turning the massive, but passive and unclear, opposition to intervention in Afghanistan into visible protest.

Concerned to shore up its base, the federal NDP adopted a policy in favour of withdrawal. The Canadian Labour Congress has taken a position against Canada’s military role in Afghanistan. This is welcome, since it can help build larger, broader mobilizations. However, NDP and CLC leaders have done virtually nothing to mobilize their members to demand “Troops Out Now.”

Building a movement around that demand will require more than organizing protests, although protesting is a vital tactic. Activists need to be able to explain why Canadian troops are in Afghanistan, and whose interests this serves. Without such an analysis, political understanding will remain superficial and necessary connections will be missed. It will be very hard to build and sustain a movement over the long haul if it fails to address the roots of war.

The problem goes much deeper than Harper or Bush. Increased militarization and the spread of neoliberal policies go hand in hand. Electing the Liberals or the Democrats won’t change that.

Imperialism is being pushed to war in the Middle East and Central Asia over the control of key resources such as oil. Canadian capital seeks to profit from gaining access to natural resources (especially for mining), land, cheap labour, investor protection and open markets. It wants greater military and national security integration with the US to help obtain these. Inside the borders of Canada, capital’s drive for resources leads it to try to dispossess indigenous peoples of their lands.

This will be a long war. We need to build opposition to the roots of the system that is inflicting it on the people of the world.★

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WITH THIS ISSUE, NEW SOCIALIST GOES FROM PUBLISHING FIVE times a year to quarterly. Our next issue, Spring 2007, will be available in early March. Subscription prices has been altered to reflect this change and are detailed on the back cover and the final page of the magazine.

new SOCIALIST

Issue #59: Winter 2006-07

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NEW SOCIALIST offers radical analysis of politics, social movements and culture in the Canadian state and internationally. Our magazine is a forum for people who want to strengthen today's activism and for those who wish to replace global capitalism with a genuinely democratic socialism. We believe that the liberation of the working class and oppressed peoples can be won only through their own struggles. For more information about the publisher of this magazine, the New Socialist Group, please see the inside back cover.

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Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Editors or members of the New Socialist Group.

New Socialist is a member of the CMPA.
Printed at JT Printing, a union shop



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NS #58 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The "Indigenous-Labour Solidarity" interview (page 28) was conducted by Tom Keefer of Autonomy and Solidarity; Wasáse supporter Adam Barker transcribed the interview, and it was published by permission of Rolf Gerstenberger. This and other interviews related to the Six Nations reclamation can be found at http://auto_sol.tao.ca/node/view/2012. The illustration by Tania Willard was reprinted by permission of the artist.

No easy road to victory

BY PHIL HEARSE

Much of today's world bears the scars of the huge defeats suffered by the Left and the international workers movement in the 1980s and '90s – rampant privatisation, the worsening of working conditions, the weakening of the labour movement and deepening wealth differentials. Although we can say there has been something of a rise of the Left and militant struggle in the first decade of the new century, nowhere has this been so marked as in Latin America.

The fact that there is today in Venezuela a government which projects socialism as the future, and the fact that in Bolivia the government comes from the 'Movement Towards Socialism' (MAS) is of enormous ideological significance. Whatever the final outcome of this phase of struggle, the poor of Latin America and the gigantic social movements they have generated have enabled big sections of the global justice movement to give an substantive content to the slogan 'another world is possible' – "socialism."

Turmoil throughout the continent has generated a new wave of strategic debate about how to defeat the oligarchy and imperialism – a debate that is rooted not in what appears to young people as the distant past (for example Chile in the early 1970s or Central America in the 1980s), but in real life alternatives in the here and now. However the experience of the last six years shows that no matter how big and militant the mass movement, there are enormous obstacles to victory – not just tenacious resistance from the local ruling classes, but also a 'crisis of political representation' among the popular masses which is only slowly and gradually being overcome.

Mainstream commentators in Europe and North America tend to talk about the 'Latin American' Left as an undifferentiated force. But as we will see, this is far from being true. There are many Latin American Lefts, with a crucial divide between the moderate 'Centre Left' which largely seeks an accommodation with neoliberalism, and a militant Left which wants to uproot it. Generally beneath the divisions is one simple question – is socialism and workers' power possible, or even thinkable, in the modern world? Centre-Left politicians give the explicit or de facto answer 'no.' And that inevitably leads to an accommodation with neoliberalism and to holding back, or even repressing, the mass movement.

It is worth going back a few years and reviewing the developments in Argentina and Brazil. The outcomes there can tell us a lot about what is happening now.

ARGENTINA – THE MOVEMENT THAT VANISHED

Between December 19 and 21, 2001, a massive popular rebellion overthrew the Argentinean president de la Rúa amid bloody street battles in which 38 people were killed. The uprising led to an unprecedented alliance between the unemployed, underemployed workers and a substantial sector of the middle class which had lost its savings in the financial crisis.

Between December 2001 and July 2002, the popular classes took over the streets blocking highways as well as the centre of Buenos Aires and provincial capitals. Some commentators say four million people took part in the movement, in an adult population of less than 30 million.

Even Right-wingers talked of a "pre-revolutionary situation," and discussion of "dual power" between the piqueteros, neighborhood assemblies and the occupied factories on the one hand and the state apparatus on the other was common.

The most popular slogan, "Que se vayan todos!" ("Out with all the politicians!"), reflected the general hostility of the public toward the major parties and political institutions. Yet 17 months later, over 65 percent of the electorate voted and the top two candidates were from the Justice Party (Peronist) including Carlos Menem, President between 1989 and 2000, the main culprit of the collapse of the economy and the impoverishment of millions of Argentines.

By mid-2004 president Kirchner enjoyed an approval rating of some 75 percent. Only a shadow of the former movement remains in the form of some worker collectives in occupied factories and smallish groupings laying claim to the title "piqueteros." How can such a dramatic turnaround be explained? For sure Kirchner is a clever politician who has acted against some elements of corruption and gangsterism in national and state government (while being careful not to antagonise key sections of capitalists and the armed forces). But that is not the main answer, for Kirchner came to power when the mass movement had already seriously declined.

The simple answer is that this huge mass movement, an

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incredible display of self-organisation which won over substantial sections of the middle classes to the side of the poor, had no unified vision of what measures to advocate to solve the economic crisis, and no mass alternative to advance in the arena of government, the antechamber of power.

Here immediately we run into important strategic debates which have been happening in and around the global justice movement. Naomi Klein in a widely circulated article asserted that the movement had been destroyed by small Left groups which had turned the neighbourhood groups into debating circles for their own views on power, and bored everyone to death. Probably there is an element of truth in the accusations of sectarianism in the many small Left parties, but even if Naomi Klein was right, several questions would remain unanswered. For example, why didn't these mass organisations have the confidence and organisational abilities to shut these disrupters up? And in any case, what is Klein's view of what the neighbourhood committees, piqueteros and occupied factories should have done?

The most brilliantly self-organised movement will not continue unless it has a reason for existing. In Argentina the power vacuum was obvious. But the Argentinean workers and urban poor lacked a mass party-type formation to the left of the Peronists, which could at least have put forward a challenge in the national elections to get into government, if not actually challenged the capitalist class at the level of overall social and political power. Such a formation could not be improvised in the middle of a relatively short political crisis. In the end the Argentinean masses went back to what they thought was the least worst option in the situation, the corrupt and almost unrecognisable shell of the Justice Party.

BRAZIL: POLITICAL COLLAPSE OF THE WORKERS PARTY

In Brazil, the election to the presidency of Luis Ignacio da Silva ('Lula') of the Workers Party (PT) in October 2002 created immense hopes and expectations for radical reform, which have largely been disappointed. Lula's failure can be measured by one simple fact. State spending in Brazil is around 14 percent of GDP, as opposed to nearly 50 percent in France and 42 percent in Britain. This represents the fact that Brazil's hyper-rich ruling class in one of the most unequal societies on earth refuses to pay any serious taxes and has complete contempt even for its own state apparatus, except as a target for corruption and a source of repression when needed. It means that no serious health system, education system or social insurance infrastructure or welfare services can be created. Without the assets of the state, the poor stay poor. Lula has blown it even if he just wanted to create a serious reforming government to modernise capitalism, let



P-SOL rally in Brazil

WWW.SAP-POS.ORG

alone remove the capitalist class from power.

This result was especially disappointing for much of the international Left which had seen the PT as a model of a united, democratic and pluralist movement to the Left of both Stalinism and social democracy. Worse, a big section of the militant and Marxist Left within the PT, including the majority of the Democracia Socialista (DS), the Fourth International section in Brazil, supports with only limited criticisms the course of the Lula government. How could such a thing have happened?

In reality my guess is that the majority of people who had followed the situation closely were not at all surprised. As the level of class struggle declined in Brazil in the 1990s, the PT and its analogue in the trade union movement, the United Workers' Confederation (CUT), moved to the Right. According to Joao Machado, a long-timer leader of the DS and a founder-member of the PT, a crucial factor in the evolution of the DS was that a majority of its activists became full-time functionaries in the trade unions, the party itself or in the city and state local governments controlled by the PT. Revolutionaries and Marxists are often the most experienced and articulate in broad formations, and thus often called on to take important responsibilities. But when the movement is going to the Right, being a full-time functionary imposes pressures towards ideological accommodation and political excuses for inexcusable facts. The Left opposition then gets reduced to the role of Left flank-guard for more Rightwing leaders.

Already in the early 1990s there was ambiguity in some of



Venezuela rally.

the DS's political formulations ("For a popular democratic government"). In retrospect however it seems obvious that the DS theorisation of the experiment in popular participation in local government in Porto Alegre, where the city council was led by the PT and the DS was politically dominant, was extremely ambiguous, if not suspect. Popular participation is of course a desirable end in itself, but it is not a strategy which will yield popular power at a national level.

The formation of the Party of Socialism and Liberty (P-SOL) is an important step in regrouping an opposition to the Left of the PT. But despite the election result of its presidential candidate Heloisa Helena (6.85%, more than six million votes) in the October 2006 elections, P-SOL remains a small formation and the task of rebuilding Brazil's militant Left will be a long one. The Right-wing evolution of the PT is a massive defeat, and almost certainly one that could not have been prevented by revolutionary Marxists within the party. But the capitulation of the majority of the DS in front of it only made the situation worse.

STRATEGIC PROBLEMS FOR THE LEFT

The intensification of the political crisis on the continent and the problems for the oligarchy have been dramatized in 2006 by the election of Evo Morales and the advent of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) government in Bolivia, as well as the long hot summer of struggle in Mexico, which culminated in the giant mobilisations against the electoral fraud which installed Felipe Calderon of the ruling PAN (National Action Party) and robbed Manuel López Obrador of the Left-of-Centre PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution).

Each of these crises pose basic questions of socialist strategy which can be summarised as follows: 1) What is the nature of these societies and their relationship with imperialism? 2) What is the nature of the ruling class? 3) What is the character of the revolutionary subject? What popular forces

might be mobilised into an alliance to make a revolutionary breakthrough? 4) What are the key steps needed to make an anti-capitalist transition and a break with the capitalist state and imperialism?

Each of the countries of Latin America is oppressed by imperialism. Each has a super-rich ruling class which is hand-in-hand with the imperialist bourgeoisie. This has created some of the most unequal societies on earth; in Mexico and Brazil the rich are rich by international standards and the poor are poor by the same standards.

The idea that there can be any kind of 'anti-imperialist alliance' with any sector of the ruling class whatsoever is tremendously far-fetched. At best there can be alliances around democratic objectives and only conjunctural

national interests. To put it another way, to achieve real democracy and real national independence requires a complete break with imperialism and the oligarchy.

For example, for Bolivia to achieve real national independence means really taking control of its own resources, i.e. gas, oil and of course water. That means inroads into the rights of private property — in other words, tasks of the socialist revolution. Equally, radical democracy at a national level cannot be achieved other than by breaking the grip of the oligarchy who ensure their control of the political process by corruption and violence. Democratic questions are directly interlinked with the issue of working-class power. The rapid evolution of a Right-wing counter-offensive and the crisis in the MAS's orientation only confirm this.

The same considerations directly relate to the land struggle. The advent of (often US-controlled) agribusiness swivels the enemy from being simply local landlords, a sub-sector of the domestic bourgeoisie, to transnational capitalist corporations. The fight against imperialism is one and the same as the struggle against the local oligarchy.

REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECT

The enormous growth of the cities, the development of agribusiness and semi-industrialisation in the major countries has significantly changed the revolutionary subject. This is summed up in the governmental slogan of nearly all of the Mexican militant Left: "un gobierno obrero, campesino, indígena y popular," or, a workers', peasants', indigenous and popular government. This crystallises what we can expect a revolutionary alliance in most of Latin America to be like.

Since the formulation of the "workers and peasants government" formula in the 1920s, the growth of the informal sector in the cities, the barrio or favela dwellers, has been dramatic. Most of the urban poor are not regularly employed, but get by through street trading, small businesses, crime, etc.

The urban poor are a vital part of the base of the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela and of course of the mass movement which eventually brought Evo Morales and the MAS to power in Bolivia. The key demands of these people revolve around the basic questions of the provision of the essentials of life: clean water, proper housing, sanitation, education and of course freedom from violence and paternalistic manipulation by the state, i.e., democracy.

A new and positive feature of the Latin American movement has been the emergence of indigenous movements, the most well-known example being the Zapatistas in Mexico and sections of the movement in Bolivia. However there is a difference between the indigenous movement in those two countries. Subcommandante Marcos and the Zapatistas pose the solution to the demands of the indigenous people as being part of a transformation of Mexico nationwide, which Marcos tends to pose as “democratization” (not socialism).

Two central issues cannot be avoided by the Latin American Left: machismo, and its opposite, women’s liberation. While the leaders of the social movements in the barrios are disproportionately women, the violence against and super-exploitation of women on the most machismo of continents is incredible; from the daily subjugation of women as the most exploited workers in an often suffocating paternalistic family to the ghastly mass murder of women in Guatemala. A more stable integration of women’s liberation into the strategy of the Latin American Left would unleash tremendous new forces and energies into the struggle.

THE QUESTION OF POWER

For the Left, the decisive issue is how to integrate all these questions—of democracy, land reform, the destruction of the oligarchy, an end to economic robbery of the elite and imperialism, the basics of life for the urban poor and liberation for indigenous people and women—into a coherent overarching strategy for the popular masses to conquer power. The “Centre-Left” forces like the PT in Brazil, the Frente Amplio in Uruguay and the PRD of Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, obviously do not agree with this way of posing the question. For them it is about getting more justice within the system, and we have seen what this means in Uruguay and Brazil: abject capitulation to neoliberalism.

This poses first a question and then a problem—that of class independence, creating political parties of the popular masses led politically by the working class independent of bourgeois nationalist and populist forces. Building a broad class struggle party on a national basis is a task which Subcommandante Marcos and the Zapatistas have avoided confronting. However, the “Other Campaign”—a bold and audacious attempt to move out of their Chiapas mountain redoubts and unify the Mexican social movements—indicates a renewed strategic thinking which objectively points in the direction of a new “party” of the oppressed. How far this will go has yet to be seen.

How is the idea of the popular masses taking state power relevant to developments in Venezuela and Bolivia? In

Venezuela the bourgeoisie have lost, or partially lost, control of the government but are still the economically ruling class—linked parasitically to the nationalised oil industry.

On the other hand, there has been tremendous development of popular self-organisation from below in the barrios and in the countryside. In addition substantial social progress has been made through the social missions, funded by oil revenues. However the poor remain legion in Venezuela and the solution to their problems will not be found outside of a radical redistribution of wealth, which means breaking the power and wealth of the oligarchy.

But in the context of a tremendous political polarisation in which the whole of the bourgeoisie and a big majority of the middle classes are against Chávez, this unstable equilibrium between the bourgeoisie and the masses, mediated by Chávez, cannot continue forever. Sooner or later there will be a gigantic confrontation and the Bolivarian movement and the Chávez leadership will have to make a choice. Depending on the loyalty of key army officers is useless.

With the threats of the Right and imperialism, the consolidation of popular committees into a national network of popular power is crucial. This must involve the arming of the popular sectors and the building of a popular militia.

There are important signs that polarisation is deepening rapidly. In Merida, Right-wing students have organised prolonged riots. The recent national congress of the progressive union federation, the UNT, split between Left and Right and did not conclude its business or elect a new leadership. These are straws in the wind and it would be stupid to ignore the gathering storm clouds. Imperialism and the bourgeoisie want Chávez out, and there is now a race between revolution and counter-revolution.

In Bolivia the summer has seen massive conflicts over the now-stalled “nationalisation” of oil and gas, and the fight over the Constituent Assembly. It seems that the MAS is internally divided; in any case the government has stumbled and made important concessions to the Right. These are very worrying signs.

Morales and his team will have to make their choice between the oligarchy and imperialism on the one hand and the self-organised masses on the other. The example of Lula and the fate of the Brazilian PT is eloquent. If you try to avoid the question of power, you will end up either defeated or capitulating.

I will leave the last words to James Petras in his conclusions about the outcome in Argentina:

“What clearly was lacking was a unified political organisation (party, movement or combination of both) with roots in the popular neighborhoods which was capable of creating representative organs to promote class-consciousness and point toward taking state power. As massive and sustained as was the initial rebellious period (December 2001-July 2002) no such political party or movement emerged — instead a multiplicity of localised groups with different agendas soon fell to quarreling over an elusive “hegemony” — driving millions of possible supporters toward local face-to-face groups devoid of any political perspective.”★

TWO PRESIDENTS, TWO GOVERNMENTS

Dual power, revolution or populist theatre?

BY DAN LA BOTZ

THE MEXICAN ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL recognized Felipe Calderón as president-elect, while a massive National Democratic Convention has proclaimed Andrés Manuel López Obrador to be the “legitimate president of Mexico.” López Obrador is now creating an alternative government, and says he will call a constituent assembly that will write a new constitution. What is happening here? Is this a radical fight for reforms? A potentially revolutionary movement? Or a spectacular piece of populist theatre?

More than a million people gathered on September 16, Independence Day, on Mexico City’s national Plaza of the Constitution and the surrounding streets for blocks around and — after enduring a drenching cloud burst — proclaimed that Andrés Manuel López Obrador was the legitimate president of Mexico. The massive National Democratic Convention (CND) repudiated the “usurper” Felipe Calderón and called for the end of the existing Mexican government, for the “abolition of the regime of privileges.” The CND also called for the organization of a campaign of national civil disobedience with one of its objectives being to prevent Calderón from taking the oath of office.

In calling the Convention, López Obrador stated that he was operating in the great Mexican revolutionary tradition beginning with Miguel Hidalgo y Castillo and José María Morelos in the

Independence struggle of 1810-1825; Benito Juárez, leader of the Liberals in the Reform Movement and the war against France in the 1850s and 60s; and Francisco Madero and Emiliano Zapata in the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1940. Yet, while claiming the revolutionary inheritance, and adopting a revolutionary rhetoric, López Obrador and his Party of the Democratic Revolution are hard at work attempting to make the most of the foothold they have in the old order.

While proclaiming a position tantamount to revolution, López Obrador and the PRD have continued to work within the existing power structure. The National Democratic Convention authorized the parties which made up López Obrador’s For the Good of All Coalition, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the Workers Party (PT), and Convergence, to reorganize to create the Broad Progressive Front (FAP) which will work as a bloc in the newly elected Mexican parliament — that is, in the parliament of the actually existing Mexican government. The PRD’s legislative coordinator, Javier González Garza, met with coordinators of the conservative National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), to create a more efficient and dynamic congress, one that would, according to the PRD’s González, end log-jams in the lower house. The PRD has also agreed to serve with the PAN and the PRI in the

collective leadership of the legislature, with Ruth Zavaleta Salgado as vice-president. PRD governors in Baja California Sur, Guerrero, Michoacán, and Zacatecas will also take power within the existing governmental structure. PRD governors have just participated in the National Governors Congress (Conago) with PAN and PRI governors. So, apparently, while repudiating the old regime, the PRD will also continue to work and serve in leadership positions within it.

Just what is happening here? Are we witnessing the emergence of a revolutionary alternative? Or is this an extraordinary and spectacular act of populist theater intended to project López Obrador into power in the next election?

FROM THE ELECTION TO THE CND

The current situation results from the irregularities, challenges and disappointments with the Mexican election of July. The Mexican Electoral Tribunal had earlier rejected López Obrador’s call for a vote-by-vote, polling-place-by-polling-place recount of the election. And, while the court recognized that Mexico’s President Vicente Fox had violated the election laws by intervening in the election campaign and that Mexican corporations had violated the law by paying for last-minute advertising attacking López Obrador, they would not on that basis overturn the election results, as they could have done. The National Association of Democratic Attorneys

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(ANAD) issued a statement asserting that the courts could have and should have overturned the election for those reasons. The court instead proclaimed Felipe Calderón the president-elect of Mexico, although López Obrador and his supporters have refused to accept the decision.

Believing that the national election in July had been stolen from them, hundreds of thousands of supporters of López Obrador and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) rallied in the national plaza and then camped there for 48 days and at the same time blocked the length of the city's principal boulevard, Avenida Reforma, and its major intersections, paralyzing the heart of the city. The night of September 15 they

babes-in-arms to the elderly, filled the streets, many carrying hand made banners and signs.

The CND assembly, in a series of voice votes, proclaimed López Obrador the legitimate president, instructed him to create a cabinet, and to establish the seat of government in Mexico City, the national capital. At the same time, the government was instructed to be itinerant, moving about throughout the country to hear from and to lead the Mexican people. The new government was instructed to take power on November 20, the anniversary of the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Getting the jump on his rival, López Obrador will then "take office" as "legitimate president" more than a week

A CONSTITUTIONAL AND PEACEFUL REVOLUTION

López Obrador claims that Felipe Calderón, "the usurper," has violated the institutional order of Mexico. López Obrador argues that he is the defender of Mexico's democratic traditions, and bases the calling of the National Democratic Convention and the projected Constituent Assembly on Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution which reads, "The national sovereignty resides essentially and originally in the people. All public power originates in the people and is instituted for their benefit. The people at all times have the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government." This article, he argues, gives the people the right to meet and to re-found their government. He argues that the Constituent Assembly will establish a more democratic government, protect the national patrimony and stop the privatization of the oil and electric power industries, and will provide for the good of all Mexicans, but will put the poor first on the list of national priorities.

Throughout the weeks of protests, sit-ins, and marches, López Obrador has constantly cautioned his followers to remain non-violent, to refuse to be provoked into confrontation, and remarkably not a window has been broken nor a slogan painted on a single wall in the city. The PRD controls the government of Mexico City and has insured that the police have functioned to facilitate the protests and protect the protestors, rather than to suppress them.

PLEBISCITARY DEMOCRACY

The National Democratic Convention was not a national democratic convention as most people understand those words. This was not a delegated convention, but a mass assembly. The CND was not organized through the structures of the Party of the Democratic Revolution, nor through coalitions of existing organizations, nor was any other structure very transparent. López Obrador and the leaders of his campaign created a committee to convene and to preside over the Convention, but the movement's rank and file had no opportunity to choose its leadership or to shape its agenda. López Obrador did not attempt to prepare the convention by convening



Oaxaca teachers greet the release of their imprisoned comrades.

struck camp, clearing away their lean-tos and tents, to permit the Mexican Army's annual Independence Day march, but then they returned the next day for the National Democratic Convention (CND) joined by over a million other Mexicans from Baja California in the North to Chiapas in the South.

The organizers claimed that 1,025,724 delegates had actually registered to be present at the convention, coming from all of the 32 states of Mexico. Many of those present on the plaza were los de abajo, Mexico's underdogs: factory workers, peasants, the self-employed, street vendors, school teachers and college and high school students. Entire families and neighbourhoods, from

before Felipe Calderón, who will not be sworn in until December 1.

The CND also created a national commission to lead the movement of civil disobedience and to prevent Calderón from taking office; the commission is to meet on September 27 and continue between October 2 and 13, concentrating all of its efforts toward the official presidential swearing-in ceremony at the beginning of December. The next full CND assembly was scheduled for Sunday, March 21 of 2007. At that next assembly the CND is expected to organize the convocation of a Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution and re-found the Mexican government.

the many mass organizations of peasants, workers and the urban poor. López Obrador did not involve himself in the planning or give an active role in the Convention to groups such as the Mexican Mine and Metal Workers Union, or Teachers Union Local 22, or the leaders of the town of Atenco, or to any other of the existing social movements. Those who led the convention and those who stood in the rain did so as individual supporters of López Obrador.

While there was enormous popular participation and popular approval of the positions presented, a convention en masse does not permit the presentation of resolutions, or debate over alternatives. This was a plebiscitary democracy where the masses shout yea or nay to the positions and alternatives offered by the person on the platform. While less rhapsodic than Fidel Castro and less charismatic than Hugo Chávez, this was a convention based in large part on the direct communication between the leader and the people in the style of Latin American caudillos since Juan Perón and long before. This is not to say that the CND did not have a clear political content, for it clearly did: an end to the ruling elite, defence of the national patrimony and social welfare for the people.

CRITICS TO THE RIGHT AND LEFT

As one would expect, all of the conservative forces have given their full support to Calderón while damning López Obrador. Throughout this process of post-election protest and the proclamation of an alternative president and government, President Fox and the National Action Party have upheld the legitimacy of the election and hailed the victory of Felipe Calderón. Like López Obrador, Fox and Calderón put themselves forward as the defenders of Mexico's democratic institutions and they argue that López Obrador threatens those institutions and raises the possibility of conflict and violence. Predictably, the Mexican business class, represented through COPARMEX, the Mexican employers' association which stands at the heart of the National Action Party (PAN), has also welcomed Calderón's victory and scorns López Obrador. Mexico's leading bishops have also called



Demonstrators face off with riot police.

upon López Obrador to concede defeat and recognize the victory of Calderón. US President George W. Bush called to congratulate Calderón on his victory early on.

López Obrador also has critics on the Left. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, founder of the Party of the Democratic Revolution and twice its candidate for president in the past, severely criticized López Obrador for surrounding himself and filling the party with opportunists, for the lack of a serious political program, and for intolerance of political differences. Cárdenas has argued that it is a great mistake for López Obrador to proclaim himself president and predicts that it will do permanent damage to Mexico's Left. Adolfo Gilly, Mexico's leading Left intellectual theorist, concurs with many of Cárdenas's criticisms, but also attacks the PRD for its two-faced position of supporting López Obrador's campaign while making deals with the PAN. He also criticizes the failure of López Obrador and the PRD to support the struggle of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and other

popular movements. Marcos Rascón, former Mexican Leftist guerrilla, former PRD congressman, and irascible radical critic argues that López Obrador is a populist with "a Bonapartist attitude," that is, that he is a would-be dictator.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), of course, has never liked López Obrador. Subcomandante Marcos, leader of the EZLN, which mounted its own rather marginal non-electoral campaign for a socialism from below, has from the beginning attacked López Obrador as fundamentally conservative and opportunist. The EZLN's Marcos did, however, speak out against the fraud in what he calls a stolen election. Whatever his critics on the Left may say, López Obrador has not only captured the imagination of the people but has also in effect become the dominant force on the Left.

THE BALANCE OF FORCES

Do López Obrador, PRD, the Broad Progressive Front, and the National Democratic Convention represent the emerging institutions of a new class power? Do we see in the movement which López Obrador leads institutions that give expressions to movements and organizations of working people and the poor which begin to represent an alternative to the existing Mexican state?

Fox, the PAN and its current ally the PRI, of course, control the Mexican government, its bureaucracy, the Army and the police and could use them to put down any serious opposition. Since 1994 the Mexican government has used the Army against the EZLN and the broader social movement in Chiapas in the South, and throughout the 1990s against drug dealers in the North. During the last year the Federal government has deployed the new Federal Prevent Police (PFP) against striking workers and community activists in central Mexico. While López Obrador has called upon the Army to refuse to obey orders to repress Mexican citizens, there is no reason to doubt the loyalty of the Army, the PFP and other police forces to the government. Mexico has used the military to put down popular movements in 1959, 1968, and 1976, and, in 1994, against the Zapatistas.

DO THE NUMBERS EXIST?

López Obrador does not appear to have the sheer numbers of supporters throughout Mexico to challenge the state. Each of the leading candidates won 16 states: López Obrador and the PRD won in the poorer center and South of Mexico while Felipe Calderón of the PAN won almost all of the more prosperous North. However, according to the disputed official count, López Obrador captured only 35.3 percent of the vote, while Calderón won 35.9 percent and Roberto Madrazo of the PRI won 22.3 percent.

That is, almost 2/3 of all voters voted for the two more conservative candidates, while only about 1/3 supported a program of reform based on increased social welfare. Even if López Obrador was cheated out of a million votes as many believe, he would still have had only a somewhat large plurality but nothing near a majority of support. While some people who voted for López Obrador as a reformer might be moved to adopt a position of revolutionary opposition to the state if they felt their votes were stolen, one would suspect that not all PRD supporters would take that position, while very few from other parties would join them.

Perhaps some on the far Left would support López Obrador in a battle over democracy, but their numbers are few.

There are large and significant social struggles taking place today in Mexico ... however the PRD has not given leadership to those struggles.

No far Left revolutionary party even qualified to appear on the ballot. Moreover, the explicitly anti-capitalist and anti-electoral "Other Campaign" of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation vehemently opposed López Obrador during the campaign, and is unlikely to support him now. Mexico's revolutionary Left appears to be smaller and less significant than it was in the 1960s-1980s.

DOES THE ORGANIZATION EXIST?

Nor does the opposition appear to have the organization, structure and leadership

to put together a force powerful enough to challenge the Mexican government at this time. Except for Mexico City and a few states such as Michoacan, the PRD has been a minority party and a deeply divided and factional party. Founded in 1989, the PRD has throughout its brief history been an electoral party, a party neither founded upon nor leading a social movement.

During the current struggle, there have been enormous demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins in Mexico City, but so far such demonstrations have been limited to Mexico City.

While the PRD at times came to a working relationship with the National Union of Workers (UNT), it has never been able to give leadership to the working class or even much support to the UNT or any other union, and López Obrador has not had a labor program. The PRD does have a significant following among working people and the poor of the central and southern states, as its electoral results indicate, but beyond elections this has not been much of an organized following.

True, there are large and significant social struggles taking place today in Mexico, particularly the series of strikes by members of the Miners and Metal Workers Union (SNTMMRM) and the teachers strike by Local 22 of the

Mexican Teachers Union (SNTE). However the PRD has not given leadership to those struggles, nor do those involved in those struggles necessarily support the PRD. The leadership of Local 22 has said that it would not participate in the National Democratic Convention called by López Obrador (though some of its members did), and it continues to negotiate with Secretary of the Interior Carlos Abascal, suggesting that it looks to this Mexican government to resolve its problems, not to some possible future republic.

Finally, Vicente Fox, Felipe Calderón

and the PAN have the support of the US government which would much prefer to have a conservative government in power, and which certainly does not want social upheaval taking place in its neighbour nation. Without a doubt Fox has been conferring with the Bush government about the situation, and one would suppose that the Mexican military has been in touch with its American counterpart. Although it would prefer that Mexico's elite take the necessary political action to resolve problems, the US would certainly be prepared to use whatever means are necessary to support the Mexican government.

THE BALANCE MIGHT BE CHANGED

Some have talked about what's happening in Mexico in terms of "dual power." Leon Trotsky used that term in his *History of the Russian Revolution* to describe what happens when a rising social class creates new and alternative institutions of social power. So far we have not seen that happen in Mexico, where a real power, the Mexican state, confronts López Obrador and the CND, an important political and social movement, but not a movement that has been built upon or yet given rise to alternative institutions of governance that represent a second power. Nor is it clear that López Obrador has the will or the capacity to create them. What he has created is a mass movement on the left with a radical rhetoric, a movement made up of people who yearn for a new society of democracy and social justice. While his rhetoric promises revolution, his actions suggest a militant struggle for reform, which is not therefore to be discounted. Within that struggle for reform, genuine revolutionary voices and forces may develop.

All of that having been said, social movements, especially if they begin to have some success, can grow rapidly, and unfolding events can force them to change their character. The balance of forces can shift rapidly and radically under the right circumstances. The power of mass movements has played a significant role in the change of governments in Latin America in the last decade. So, while López Obrador and the PRD may not yet have sufficient strength, a mistake by the government could suddenly give a lift to the opposition movement. ★

The coming of a new era?

BY MARC BECKER

Since Left-populist Hugo Chavez's presidential election in Venezuela in 1998, the entire continent of South America has taken a Leftward tilt. The victory of Leftist candidates in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and most significantly Evo Morales in Bolivia, seemed to confirm that direction. Subsequent electoral defeats of Leftist candidates in Peru and Colombia in 2006 led pundits to pontificate that the tide had changed. Ecuador's October 15 presidential elections are allegedly one more plebiscite on the Latin American Left.

Underlying this international context, activists debate what are potentially more important issues for the Left, both in Ecuador as well as globally. Is a struggle for social justice better carried out as a social movement on the streets or in the electoral realm? Should the Left build a broad popular movement or organize on a class basis? These issues do not seem to have simple answers, and the inherent conflicts in building a movement for social change appear to be endless and potentially unresolvable.

In 1990, a powerful Indigenous levantamiento or uprising swept across Ecuador. Organized as a grassroots social movement rather than a political party, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) rose to the forefront of these protests. Indigenous demands for respect and equality had revolutionary implications that threatened the country's white, elite power base. CONAIE came to be seen as a model for how civil society could organize to fight for its rights.

For years, indigenous organizations debated whether to engage in electoral politics, whether to forward their own candidates and whether to support other Leftist parties. CONAIE initially decided not to participate in elections, arguing that neither the political system nor political parties were functioning in a way that represented indigenous peoples' interests. The formation in 1995 of the Movimiento Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik (MUPP, Pachakutik Movement for Plurinational Unity) represented an alternative to forming an ethnic party or merging with existing Leftist groups. Indigenous peoples and other sectors of Ecuador's popular movements would organize together as equals in a joint project to achieve common goals of social justice.

Pachakutik is an Indigenous Kichwa word which signifies change, rebirth, transformation and the coming of a new era. Incorporated as a political movement rather than political party, Pachakutik was organized in a horizontal, democratic and inclusive fashion. It explicitly identified itself as part of the new Latin American Left that embraced principles of community, solidarity, unity, tolerance and respect. Pachakutik opposed the government's neoliberal economic policies and favoured a more inclusive and participatory political system. It represented a culmination of CONAIE's drive to insert indigenous peoples directly into debates, giving them a voice and allowing them to speak for themselves.

2006 ELECTIONS

A key debate emerged within Pachakutik over not only who to support



CONAIE leader Auki Tituana.

as a presidential candidate, but even whether they should participate in the October 15, 2006 elections. In two previous presidential campaigns, Pachakutik had allied with an outsider and the result was not positive. Most notably, in 2003 Pachakutik had joined Lucio Gutiérrez's government only to leave six months later with complaints that it had elected a government to power in which it had no real power.

For 2006, some activists supported running an Indigenous candidate. Most commonly mentioned were long-time CONAIE leader Luis Macas or Auki Tituana, an honest and capable mayor of the small town of Cotacachi. Others wanted to support someone from outside the movement, most commonly the mestizo Rafael Correa who had gained broad support as Economic Minister for his anti-neoliberal stances. Correa had national exposure and broad popularity, but some questioned whether he was ideologically committed to Pachakutik's Centre-Left agenda. Previous problems arguably resulted not from engaging electoral politics, but rather from running candidates not tightly integrated into social movements. This debate also went to the heart of the conceptualization of Pachakutik. Should it convert into an

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indigenous party or retain its original structure as a multi-ethnic political movement? As the best organized sector of civil society, the Left could not succeed without the participation of indigenous peoples. Likewise, if indigenous peoples did not join a broader leftist movement they threatened to do little more than isolate themselves from wider political movements.

Eventually, Pachakutik decided to select a candidate from within its ranks, deciding that it had paid too high of a price for forming alliances outside of its own movement. At first Macas had discarded suggestions that he should run for the presidency, determined to stay at the head of CONAIE as a social movement protesting neoliberal economic policies. When supporters pressed him to run, he proposed a primary in order for the Left to unify around a single candidate. Other parties rejected this proposal, preferring instead to run their own campaigns, and almost certainly assuring that none of the Leftist candidates would win. Commentators criticized the Left for its apparent fear of democracy, arguing that a primary was the only mechanism to arrive at a unified and legitimate candidate. Vanity and sectarian interests triumphed over a struggle for social justice. Splitting the popular vote opened the way for right-wing candidates.

Macas finally accepted Pachakutik's nomination, and formally launched his campaign with an ethnic flourish at the Inti Raymi (June solstice sun festival) celebrations at the Puntichil archaeological site in Cayambe. First in Kichwa and then in Spanish, Macas invoked the memories of Inka leaders Tupac Amaru and Atahualpa. "Today true politics are reborn," Macas proclaimed. "Politics of our communities, politics of honesty." Macas announced a plan of government based on the nationalization of natural resources, recuperation of dignity, ending corruption and calling for a constituent assembly to address fundamental problems that kept leading to failures in Ecuador's state structures.

"Alliances are still the way to go, in the future," says anthropologist Fernando García. "However, not alliances with the main political parties, but with civil society organisations that want to rebuild the strength of the left, and which support the movement's political platform." Coordinator Gilberto Talahua emphasizes

that as a collective movement, Pachakutik was fundamentally different than Centre-Left parties with individual membership. Organizationally, Pachakutik utilized a collective decision-making process in contrast to the vertical nature of traditional leftist political parties.

A significant sub-current in Pachakutik publicly disagreed with a Macas candidacy, preferring instead to support Correa, who they believed had a better chance of winning. Macas' supporters compared Correa to Gutiérrez, complaining that his actions were deeply fracturing the Indigenous movement. Some who initially supported Correa's candidacy left, complaining that Pachakutik was losing its multi-cultural origins and becoming an exclusionary ethnic party. Without broader alliances, Pachakutik lagged behind the traditional parties representing oligarchical interests. Pachakutik became as fragmented and divided as the rest of Ecuador.

A record 17 presidential candidates registered for the October 15 elections, almost guaranteeing that no candidate would gain 50 percent of the vote thereby requiring a November 22 run-off election. June polls placed centrist León Roldós in the lead with 23 percent, followed by conservative Cynthia Viteri from the Social Christian Party with 16 percent. A large number of voters remained undecided, and some observers predicted that a plurality of votes would be blank or spoiled. Not only indigenous movements but right-wing, populist and progressive political parties were also deeply fractured. Ecuador is posed to continue to suffer from a series of weak governments and more political instability, arguably brought on by neoliberal policies.

Macas ranked in last place in the polls, with about one percent of the vote. Racial discrimination remained a problem, with the media often ignoring his candidacy. Nevertheless, in rural areas Macas met with a strong base of support. Pachakutik's campaign underscored that indigenous efforts, whether on the streets or in the voting booth, were unlikely to succeed without support from other sectors of Ecuador's diverse social movements.

HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD

John Holloway's 2002 book *Change the World Without Taking Power* proposes that

the world cannot be changed through taking control over state structures. Instead, the revolutionary challenge facing the twenty-first century is to change the world without taking power. Debates between focussing on building a social movement or engaging electoral politics have long run through the left, and to a certain point reflects polemics between anarchists and communists over the usefulness of state structures in making revolutionary social changes. In engaging these issues, indigenous movements in Ecuador are little different than Leftist activists elsewhere.

Indigenous movements in Ecuador are strong enough to bring down governments but not united enough to rule on their own, or even possibly in alliance with others. Shifting from a grassroots social movement to a national-level electoral apparatus proved to be difficult and wrought with complications. Although organized as a civil society, indigenous activists had realized the potential of a social movement, the promises of political party politics remained elusively beyond their grasp. Eschewing electoral politics for an exclusive focus on social movement organizing did not seem a viable alternative to realize the depth of social changes necessary.

It is easy to criticize one path, but perhaps irresponsible to do so without laying out concrete and viable alternatives. The case of indigenous movements (as well as the broader Left) in Ecuador would seem to underscore the argument that it is not possible to change the world without taking power, but neither is taking power all that it takes to change the world. Changing the world is a puzzling but pressing issue that indigenous activists, along with the rest of us, continue to try to solve.

ADDENDUM

IN THE OCTOBER 15 ELECTIONS, ALVARO Noboa, a pro-US billionaire populist and the country's richest man, came in first place with about 26 percent of the vote. Left populist Rafael Correa came in second with about 22 percent. A runoff between the two candidates will be held on November 26. Luis Macas of Pachakutik came in a dismal sixth place, with barely 2 percent of the vote. ★

Uribe and the paramilitarization of the Colombian state

BY JASMIN HRISTOV

On May 28, 2006 Colombian president Alvaro Uribe Velez was re-elected with a victory of 62 percent. How is it possible that in a country where 11 million human beings are unable to meet their basic food requirements, where three million people have been internally displaced (often through unimaginable atrocities by the army and paramilitary groups) and where the threats, torture and assassination of members of social movements and human rights activists have taken on emergency proportions, a right-wing president wins a second mandate through a supposedly democratic election?

Most of the North American public's knowledge of the Colombian conflict is confined to the representation offered by mainstream media and literature – the efforts of a democratic government and its allies to save its people from the savage, irrational and unpredictable narco-terrorists. This kind of propaganda is part of an ongoing ideological production that inverts social reality in a way that enables the powerful to claim that war is peace, state-violence is democracy, impunity is justice, poverty is a sign of progress, human rights defenders are terrorists and the victims of crime are the perpetrators. To those who easily fall into the trap of this deception, both in and outside Colombia, Uribe's second term in office indeed is interpreted as a promise for more security, less violence and a step towards crushing the guerrillas and establishing peace. However, there are many others for whom Uribe's militaristic approach represents more bloodshed, terror, fear, insecurity and misery.

Apart from the fact that the May 2006 presidential election (just like the March 2006 legislative one) was anything but democratic, it is crucial to recognize that Uribe himself is not the central issue at stake here, but only the tip of the iceberg. To anyone familiar with the historical and material nature of Colombia's internal war, the news of the second mandate of

Bush's closest ally in Latin America hardly came as surprising. The history of this country has shown that the efforts of the dominant classes to maintain their power by progressively dispossessing the working class and destroying all forces of resistance, is the heart which keeps the war alive. These efforts have found expression in various politico-economic models throughout history. Only by contextualizing Uribe's re-election with regards to the establishment he represents, can we fully appreciate the complex interplay of forces that made possible the May 2006 political outcome and the implications of the latter. Below I briefly sketch the four main features of that model.

As in many other Latin American countries, the seeds of present day social strife can be found in the concentration of the country's land and resources under the control of a tiny minority, matched by the progressive dispossession of the majority, originating with the European invasion in the 16th century and continuing after the emergence of the independent nation state. Today, economic liberalization has reinforced once again the shift of wealth to the dominant groups and the precarious living conditions of the low-income population. In this country rich in petroleum, gold, emeralds, minerals, vegetation, fresh water and numerous other resources, millions of women and men have been

denied their human dignity. While the worries of refined individuals belonging to the upper class are filled up by matters such as plastic surgeries, 62 percent of the population lives in poverty. While the rich take their kids to see the wonders of Florida's Disney World, over half of the country's children go to bed hungry.

The profound class divisions have historically been maintained through a strong reliance on violence by those with economic and political power against the working majority and the poor in order to acquire control over resources, forcibly recruit labour and eliminate or suppress dissent. It is not a mere coincidence that the implementation of the neoliberal project has been accompanied by: enhancement in the capacity of the state's security apparatus and paramilitary groups; expansion of violence and human rights; and subjection of social movements to various extermination tactics.

If we then take into consideration the historical continuity in the strong relationship between the impoverishment of the greater part of the population and the acts of violence that keep people inside exploitative social relations, we realize that in fact, the solid bond between violence and capital accumulation constitutes the first and central feature of the politico-economic model currently in place in Colombia.

It is crucial to understand here that the violence unleashed against the poor and those challenging the establishment does not consist of merely the one directly performed by state forces (even though it is always state-sanctioned). This takes us to the second characteristic of the model – the multiplicity of violence and the interdependency among its actors, a major one of which has been the paramilitary. The development of paramilitarism, which can be understood as an extension of the state's coercive apparatus, merits a brief examination here, since it has had far-reaching consequences with respect to the onslaught on revolutionary forces, the relentless massive uprooting of millions of

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countryside folks and securing the grip of dominant groups on power. It began in the 1950s as a product of the joint counter-insurgency efforts of the Colombian and US administrations. Starting in the 1980s, the capitalist class of Colombia, including large-scale landowners, cattle-ranchers, the mining entrepreneurs (particularly those in the emerald business), and narco-lords, played a more direct role in the setting up of paramilitary forces. The present-day collaboration between the paramilitary and the Colombian armed forces, US military personnel in the country as well as the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency of US), has been well-documented but always denied by the official institutions.

Gradually, the right-wing armed groups have been penetrating state institutions at all levels (in addition to those of the coercive apparatus) as well as the national (legal and illegal) economy. To understand the paramilitarization of politics we need to look no further than President Uribe himself. A declassified 1991 US national security report produced by the Pentagon places Alvaro Uribe Velez on a list of wanted Colombian narco-terrorists. Like many drug-traffickers, Uribe has thick connections to the paramilitary of a direct and personal nature. For example, one of his properties in the state of Cesar has been identified repeatedly by human rights bodies as an epicenter of unleashing paramilitary violence.

The implantation of paramilitary dominance inside major state institutions has been essential to the reproduction of the conditions in which human rights violators thrive and remain impune. Here the third characteristic of the Colombian democratatorship model (to use Eduardo Galeano's term), where 97 percent of human rights abuses remain unpunished, comes into play. Impunity, the most visible symptom of the illegality of the state's application of violence, inevitably speaks of the criminality of the state.

While torture, terror and murder have become an art, entailing barbarities such as cutting up persons piece by piece while alive and mutilating women's bodies beyond recognition, Colombia has been steadily regarded as one of Latin America's most stable democracies. Welcome to the fourth and most interesting feature of the model: its duality – the

PHOTO BY GARY LEECH



The AUC receives funding from the drug trade, large landowners and wealthy businessman.

ability to cover its fascist nature through a democratic façade. Let me deconstruct here two major events which have served as conjuring acts that have allowed the machinery of terror to remain hidden under the mantle of a virtually non-existent democratic state of law.

The first occurred in February 2006 – an important moment in Colombia's history when President Uribe proudly announced the completion of the demobilization of the largest paramilitary organization, the AUC, as a great stride towards the establishment of peace and security in this war-torn nation. Uribe's administration has done its best so far to accommodate the demands of AUC leaders with the help of several legislative measures oriented towards pardoning their crimes, giving short prison sentences (maximum eight years for the perpetrators of crimes against humanity) and even allowing violators to escape justice by paying a fine, performing community service or emigrating.

During her trip to Colombia in March 2006, the US Undersecretary of State declared that her country is proud to be a partner of President Uribe, who is clearly winning the war on terrorism and drug-trafficking. A careful examination of the demobilization process beyond its appearance reveals the absurdity of the above statement. Firstly, while between December 2002 and February 2006 paramilitary operations had officially ceased, the number of attacks carried out by these groups continued to rise. Secondly, in many cases criminals and drug-dealers had claimed to be paramilitaries who were disarming, while in reality large numbers of the AUC fighters (no one can tell exactly how many) remained active. Thirdly, many of the demobilized have been recycled into state security bodies,

while others have formed new paramilitary groups. Equally important is the increasing wealth inequality, which ensures the viability of armed groups of paramilitary nature.

In addition to all the reasons cited so far, the deceitful element of the Uribe-led peace process lies in its very essence. There was never a need for peace-talks whatsoever between the government and the right-wing armed groups, since the two were never at war. What took place in reality was a conversation among the different constituents of one system – the terror machinery of the powerful. Through this conjuring act, the more the paramilitary and the state fuse into one whole, the more it would appear that paramilitarism, as such, has ceased to exist.

The Spring 2006 elections is the second farce which I believe exemplifies and at the same time has contributed to the duality of the model. In addition to the ideological production that inundated citizens for months prior to the big day, the government and the paramilitary sought to ensure Uribe's victory for the May 28 election through a wide variety of techniques all of which can be classified as violations of civil liberties. Not only did this false victory rely on fear, violence, and fraud, as its main tools, but even statistically it stood weak since 55 percent of Colombia's eligible voters abstained.

Considering the six aspects of this model, it is clear Uribe's re-election signifies: 1) The continuation of a system characterized by unequal, exploitative, alienating and exclusionary social relations; 2) The aggravation of the country's subordinate position in the global capitalist hierarchy; 3) The consolidation of US imperial (military and economic) presence; 4) The legalization of illegality, a fusion of the legal and illegal in such a creative way, that the government can claim the paramilitary no longer exists, when in reality it has profoundly penetrated the very fabric of state institutions and the national economy; 5) The initiation of a new phase of the model: the unified Colombian para-narco state; 6) The invigoration of social struggles.

The system of dehumanization, which prioritizes profit over human life, has not been able to silence those who have chosen to become Internal Enemies rather than sell their dignity.★

Cuba's likely transition

By SAMUEL FARBER

It is highly likely that Cuba will undergo a post-“Communist” transition beyond the mere replacement of Fidel Castro as the head of the Cuban state.

Social and economic changes have been taking place notwithstanding episodically increased political repression such as the harsh crackdown on dissidents in the spring of 2003. Specifically, there has been a significant degree of cultural and religious liberalization and a number of important but limited market oriented economic reforms, most notably the growth of substantial foreign investment in the form of joint ventures with the Cuban government, and the legalization and establishment of the dollar economy in 1993. On the political front, however, the hold of the one-party state continues to be very strong.

The natural death of Fidel Castro will remove the most cohesive element of Cuba's political system. The regime's popular support and legitimacy will decline. There is little doubt that the regime has already lost popular support. Yet, Fidel Castro retains significant popular backing, or at least the awe and respect, of a substantial part of the Cuban population. It is doubtful that other leaders, including Fidel's non-charismatic brother Raúl, will be able to fill Fidel Castro's shoes. The main problem is that Fidel Castro has been the sole and final arbiter of the differences within the state and party bureaucracies, and the irreplaceable “caudillo” (strong man) who initiates and dictates the main political line from above.

Fidel Castro's unique power has been strengthened by the Cuban leaders' fear of the likely consequences of political

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Castro's health has renewed discussions about Cuba's future.

divisions within the ruling circles. The absence of democratic mechanisms to resolve disagreements within the Communist party-state leadership almost automatically converts disagreements into at best enforced anonymity, if not charges of disloyalty. With Fidel Castro gone, there will be no one who will settle such differences.

The passing of Fidel Castro will open the possibility that one or more factions of the bureaucratic apparatus will attempt to obtain support outside the top echelons of the system, and appeal for popular support of their positions. This appeal for support will find an echo in the pent-up frustrations and long suppressed hunger for consumer goods among the population at large, and in the sense of hopelessness about obtaining a better future, particularly among the young. The turmoil created by the factional conflict is likely to provoke Army intervention. Army intervention could possibly take place either through an open coup that would lead to an outright military dictatorship, or through the preservation of the outward trappings of civilian rule.

The natural demise of Fidel Castro will also have a serious impact on Cuba's

foreign relations, particularly with the US. The end of the Cold War vastly reduced Cuba's importance for US foreign policy, making domestic political considerations the principal force determining Washington's policy towards the island republic. Notwithstanding the repeated assertions of the Cuban government, a US military invasion of the island has not been an option for a long time. The military option has been replaced by an aggressive imperialist policy of continual economic and political harassment trying to make life as difficult as possible for the Cuban government and people, with the aim of hastening the internal collapse of the regime. Yet, at the same time, the massive export of hundreds of millions of dollars a year of food and processed goods to Cuba, allowed for the last several years as a “humanitarian” exception to the US blockade, has created a very powerful business bloc interested in doing business with Cuba and ending the economic war against that country. This bloc has attained some success with several bipartisan congressional votes (that did not become law due to presidential veto threats) that would have dealt serious blows to the blockade. It is not too much to speculate that these forces will grow in strength and will succeed after Fidel Castro dies, even if Raúl Castro, or some other top Communist leader, holds on to power.

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THE ARMY

It is difficult to imagine a Cuban transition without the Army playing a major role in the process. First, the Cuban Army is, relatively speaking, the best organized institution in the island. Second, the Army has not been involved in internal repression except for situations of armed rebellion and combat (under the Soviet model operating in Cuba, it is the state security organs, organizationally distinct from the armed forces, which are in charge of carrying out the tasks of internal repression). Third, due to compulsory military service, the Cuban Army has been a more inclusive institution than the more exclusive Communist Party. Fourth, the Cuban Army has for some time been a major player in Cuban economic life. The Army's economic role includes both its own businesses, such as the huge business conglomerate GAESA that includes the tourist enterprise Gaviota, as well as high army officers occupying leading positions in other key areas of the Cuban economy such as the sugar industry. In the process, the Cuban Army has educated and developed an important group of technocrats who, together with a group of civilian technicians, have for some time played a major role in the Cuban economy and society. Fifth, there is evidence to suggest that Raúl Castro and the Cuban military that he heads have tried, in the past, to build bridges with the US, possibly in preparation for a transition in Cuba. On various occasions during 2001 Raúl Castro declared that the US and Cuba should widen their areas of cooperation "in spite of political differences" on issues such as drugs, emigration, and the struggle against terrorism. In 2002, he pledged his cooperation with US forces at the Guantánamo Naval Base, when it became a camp for prisoners of the "War on Terror."

Raúl has acquired a reputation as an advocate and organizer of political repression, but also as an able administrator and economic pragmatist who, according to reports, advised and urged his brother Fidel to carry out the economic reforms, such as the legalization of dollars, which were implemented in the nineties. Regardless of who occupies the Cuban presidency after Fidel Castro's demise, the

Cuban armed forces have positioned themselves as the logical successors to Fidel in real power terms.

IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS

One of the many unknowns about a Cuban transition is whether the Army-led road towards a form of state controlled capitalism, will take place along the "Chinese" road of a strongly repressive one-party state with very little room for the development of independent popular organizations, or whether it will take the less likely authoritarian "Russian" form of an ostensible formally democratic society with little democratic content. One "advantage" of the "Russian" course is that it would allow a little more room for the expression of political currents than under the "Chinese" model.

The turmoil created by the factional conflict is likely to provoke Army intervention, either through an open coup that would lead to an outright military dictatorship, or through the preservation of the outward trappings of civilian rule.

Any degree of political opening in Cuban society will result in an explosion of previously suppressed political and cultural expressions. Hundreds of thousands of Cubans have long resented the inability to speak up and the "double morality" that they have been forced to practice in their daily existence. But the main political thrust of the transition will be to disregard any social or human considerations that may stand in the way of the new state-controlled capitalist road.

State policies will likely promote "winners": tourism and the industries supplying it, biotechnology, tobacco, extractive industries such as nickel and oil

and possibly a newly developed maquiladora industry. The "losers" will be neglected: a good part of "non-competitive" manufacturing, the sugar industry and, with some exceptions such as citrus, agriculture in general. The Cuban welfare state, already under severe strain after the collapse of the Stalinist bloc, will probably decay even further. Black Cubans will continue to suffer more than others as they already have in the "special period" that began in the nineties, except that it will get even worse for them, at least in relative terms. Regions of the country with a "losing" economy will continue to suffer disproportionately. Inequality is likely to grow even within the metropolitan area of Havana itself.

To the degree that an open political life will exist during the transition, a hard right will develop based on native conservative elements in addition to the Cuban-American rightists returning to the island. Communist Fidelismo is likely to remain an important political force. Neo-Fidelismo will increasingly draw on Cuban nationalism and gradually dispose of Marxist language while maintaining some form of "socialist" ideology. It will resist the neo-liberal trend in Cuban politics during a post-Communist transition, in the only way it knows: a bureaucratic, authoritarian and paternalist manner unable to tap the democratic roots of the popular resistance to capitalist neoliberalism.

There will be two fronts of resistance in the transition: first, in defense of the welfare state, national sovereignty and self-determination against US, Canadian and European encroachment, and second, for workers' rights, civil liberties, women's liberation and democracy against the new authoritarianism that is likely to replace the Communist system.

There are two factors that will make it difficult to build a democratic revolutionary left alternative to capitalist neoliberalism and to neo-Fidelismo: the small size and weakness of the groups and individuals who have been left-wing opponents of the Castro regime, and the likelihood the hegemony of neoliberalism will continue to prevail throughout most of the world. The one-party dictatorship's discrediting of socialism will further add to the difficulties. ★

US foreign policy strategies in Latin America

BY RUTH BLAKELEY

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Rally in El Alto, Bolivia

Since World War II, US foreign policy in the global South, and particularly Latin America, has been shaped by the will to ensure that the US maintains its dominant position and that it protects and promotes the interests of US capitalist elites. In this sense US foreign policy has been characterised by continuities, despite claims at the end of the Cold War that the US was entering a new era in its foreign relations. Despite these continuities in US foreign policy, the strategies for achieving these objectives have shifted. At times the dominant strategy has been coercive, and at others it has involved securing popular endorsement for efforts to establish a particular model of democracy in the South that lends itself to US interests. I outline here the shifting strategies of US foreign policy in Latin America since World War II.

COLD WAR STRATEGIES: COERCION AND REPRESSION

During the Cold War, US foreign policy strategy in Latin America was characterised predominantly by repression, by which I mean systematic violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, not simply directly, but also through proxy agents. The US engaged in or supported repression in various forms in nearly every Latin American state during the Cold War. This included directly invading some states, sponsoring coups in others and advocating repression, including torture, through the military and intelligence training it offered foreign

military personnel as part of its counterinsurgency (CI) campaigns. It also involved the establishment of Operation Condor, a network for collaboration between the military and intelligence personnel of various Latin America states, led by the US. Its activities involved gathering and sharing intelligence on supposed insurgents and cooperating to detain, interrogate, torture and assassinate them.

An overview of US training of Latin American military forces gives us valuable insight into US foreign policy strategy more broadly during the Cold War. Between 1950 and 1993 the US trained over 100,000 Latin American military and police personnel in CI techniques. Training that took place at the US Army School of Americas (SOA) advocated

repression, including torture. Revelations of now declassified training manuals advocating torture led to its closure in 2000, following massive public protest by School of Americas Watch (SOAW). It was immediately re-opened as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC).

Investigations by the US Assistant to the Secretary of Defence for Intelligence Oversight, following the exposure of these training manuals, identified two dozen passages that were “or could be interpreted not to be consistent with US policy.” I identified a further seventeen passages in the Handling Sources manual alone that would violate the Geneva Conventions. They included material advocating interrogation, torture and assassination; the infiltration of all types of legitimate social organisation, including youth groups, trade unions and political parties; using fear tactics to recruit counterintelligence agents; the murder of informants no longer useful to the military and intelligence agencies; and intimidating families of insurgent suspects. Despite the conclusions of the investigation, these passages were entirely consistent with US Cold War foreign policy strategy, not just in Latin American but across the South. The reality is that the SOA manuals mirrored US training of its own and military and intelligence personnel during the Cold War, and the forces it trained from 102 countries throughout the period, as revealed by other military and CIA manuals.

The consequences of US-led repression in Latin America were devastating. In Guatemala, Amnesty International estimated that between 1966 and 1976, the number of victims of secretly sanctioned murders and disappearances was over 20,000. The Commission for Historical Clarification in Guatemala concluded that US military assistance had a “significant bearing on human rights violations.” In Chile, the Report of the Chilean

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National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation found that during and in the years following the US-backed 1973 coup, 2,279 people were killed. Of those, 815 were victims of execution and death by torture, 957 disappeared following arrest and the remainder were killed either as a result of war tribunals, during political protests, alleged escape attempts or gun battles. Throughout, General Pinochet's government continued to receive US support and military training. Such human rights abuses occurred across Latin America with impunity, while the US provided ongoing support and military assistance in order to protect US strategic and elite interests.

POST-COLD WAR STRATEGIES: MARKET DEMOCRACY AND NEOLIBERALISM

US foreign policy strategy underwent a significant shift that coincided with the thawing of the Cold War. The emphasis was now on establishing "democracy," not by coercion, but by political legitimization. The democracy being promoted by the US, variously referred to by critics as "low intensity democracy," "polyarchy" and "market democracy," does not constitute a form of democracy which invites opting for alternatives that stray far from the systems and practices advocated by the capitalist elite. Rather, it offers only limited choices and is carefully managed to guarantee that elite interests are protected. The outcome is the presence of democratic processes, but with large sections of the population still not having basic needs met. The emphasis on democracy promotion through political legitimization was to characterise US strategy across the global South up until 9/11.

The US has gone to great lengths through organs such as the National Endowment for Democracy and USAID to establish democracy in Latin America. The consequences have been mixed. For example, the neoliberalisation of El Salvador since the end of the civil war, which included structural adjustment policies and the privatisation of public services, has been hugely beneficial for US capital, with more than 300 US companies establishing either a permanent presence or working through representatives in the country. This has largely been achieved through ensuring that

support is maintained for the ARENA party, and that movements on the Left that might threaten US capital are co-opted or marginalised. US support for civic and political groups was channelled towards groups aligned with the ruling ARENA party, thus marginalizing the Left-wing FMLN. Rather than creating an independent agency to oversee post-war reconstruction, a government agency was established to administer the funding agreed with the World Bank. This agency channelled the majority of the funds, which came from USAID, through the Municipales en Acción programme, which had been established under the Comisión Nacional para la Restauración de Areas Afectadas, the agency in charge of the civilian components of the CI efforts during the war. Thus, institutions that had previously been involved in suppressing support for the insurgent left were now responsible for overseeing reconstruction among the very communities they had previously fought against. Less than one percent of the funds were

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channelled through opposition NGOs, even though they had proven experience in local development projects in the former conflict zones.

The effects for El Salvador's poor have been mixed. While growth has occurred since the end of the 1980s, and a number of social indicators have improved, problems persist. Poverty is still extremely high compared to other Latin American states. In 1991, the extreme poverty rate was 33 percent. While this has fallen, the United Nations Development Programme reports that on the international extreme poverty line, whereas the

incidence of extreme poverty for Argentina and Uruguay was just 0.2 percent, El Salvador was at the top end of the scale with an extreme poverty rate of 18 percent in 2002. Some of the growth in GDP is the result of extraordinary levels of remittances from Salvadoran workers living overseas, which account for more than 10 percent of annual GDP, according to the World Bank. Many Salvadoran children grow up with little contact with their fathers, who can eke out a better salary working outside the country, usually in the US, than they can in El Salvador. There are large health and education gaps, and limited infrastructure in the poorest areas, which tend to be rural.

POST 9/11 STRATEGIES: REGIME CHANGE

Since 9/11, US foreign policy strategy has continued to emphasise democracy promotion in Latin America, and these efforts have intensified. Indeed, this strategy is especially favoured by US neo-conservatives. They are entirely committed to the US using unilateral force, including regime change, to this end, where political legitimization fails, and see no contradiction between this and their ultimate goal of establishing democracy. There has therefore been a resurgence of support for repression in Latin America and across the global South. Beyond Latin America, this has been through the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq; attempts to re-define torture; the detention of terror suspects in facilities such as Guantánamo Bay, where alleged abuses have occurred; and the policy of extraordinary rendition, involving transferring suspects to third party countries where torture of detainees is commonplace.

In Latin America, the use of repression by the US has not been abandoned, despite the intensification of democracy promotion. Secretive military training for Latin American forces is ongoing, and the US has supported coups to overthrow governments considered a threat to US interests. Increasing militarization of the region is occurring under US leadership. The majority of US training of Latin American military personnel remains secretive and devoid of any human rights content, and has intensified since 9/11, with training now being offered to states

that were previously banned by Congress from receiving certain training because of their poor human rights records. The exception is the training at WHINSEC, which I observed over a two-month period in 2004. It is now transparent, is subject to external oversight and contains significant human rights content. This accounts for just one percent of all foreign military training, however, and even at WHINSEC, there are worrying signs that some of the positive changes are being reversed, including the replacement of a very critical external oversight board by more right-wing figures following White House intervention in 2005.

The US also continues to see military intervention and support for coups as a viable option in Latin America where its interests are threatened. Following elections in Haiti in 2000, when left-wing Jean-Bertrand Aristide was returned to office, US Special Forces trained 600 paramilitaries, a number of whom were known abusers of human rights and were willing to overthrow Aristide. Some of them launched a coup in 2004, and enjoyed tacit support from the US, which then allegedly assisted in Aristide's exile, at gunpoint. The US insists that Aristide voluntarily went into exile, and that he handed over a letter of resignation and left willingly. Amnesty International reported that there were some 300 cases of killings in Port-au-Prince alone following the coup, at the

hands of the armed gangs associated with the coup. The truth of the Bush administration's role may not be known for some time. However, the evidence indicates that the US was involved in funding opposition to Aristide, had trained known abusers of human rights as paramilitaries, even though their wish to overthrow a democratically elected government was common knowledge, and they were very slow to act to prevent the coup. In this sense, the US resorted to precisely the tactics it had used throughout the Cold War.

US MEDDLING IN VENEZUELA

Venezuela has also experienced US interference in its democratic process, including being implicated in a coup in 2002 to overthrow democratically-elected leader, Hugo Chávez. While it is not possible to prove at this stage whether the US engineered it, there was overt approval within the Bush administration, as indicated by the comments of George Folsom, president of the International Republican Institute, on the day after the coup: "Last night, led by every sector of civil society, the Venezuelan people rose up to defend democracy in their country. Venezuelans were provoked into action as a result of systematic repression by the Government of Hugo Chávez." This reflected the Bush administration's position – that Chávez is undemocratic. At least 100 people were killed in the events surrounding the coup. Other

revelations have surfaced not just of senior officials being involved, but of the CIA and senior officials also having prior knowledge of the coup and not warning Chávez in advance, an indication of US support for the coup.

More recently, social reform programmes such as the redistribution of land and the re-nationalisation of oil and gas reserves launched by Chávez and by Evo Morales in Bolivia have been met by significant hostility from the US. This has included condemnations of both governments with the US arguing that they threaten democracy. Meanwhile, US military activity in Latin America has intensified, with increased training of military personnel from states bordering Venezuela and Bolivia, and proposals for a US military base in Paraguay close to the Bolivian border. The US argues that the training and proposed base are necessary for US counter-drug and counter-terror operations. The reality is that such militarisation constitutes an attempt by the US to reassert its influence and dominance in the region and to thwart alternatives to neoliberalism.

The main objectives of US foreign policy since World War II have been to ensure US global dominance and to open up the global South to US capitalist elites. Nowhere have efforts of this kind been more intense and more sustained than in Latin America. The US has used two key strategies to subjugate Latin America to its objectives. Firstly, the US has used armed coercion, either directly or through proxy forces that it has trained to carry out its CI campaigns. This has been at great cost to human rights. Secondly, the US has sought to establish democracy and neoliberalism in Latin America, as recently this has been considered the most effective means of ensuring the spread of global capitalism, ultimately benefiting US elites. The benefits for the populations of Latin America are extremely limited. The democratic systems that have been established offer only choices that do not conflict with the interests of the US state and US capitalist elites. Real alternatives are co-opted, marginalised or, increasingly since 9/11, deemed undemocratic and met with coercion. Similarly, the neoliberalisation of Latin America has not improved the harsh conditions faced by many of Latin America's poor. ★

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Unearthing the contradictions

Bolivia, Venezuela and the future of the Latin American Left

BY JEFFERY R. WEBBER

VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT HUGO Chávez and Bolivian president Evo Morales provoke intense opinions, not simply in their respective countries but across the globe. Chávez's bold denunciation of George W. Bush as "The Devil" at the United Nations General Assembly on September 20 sharpened his usual taunting of the US president as "Mr. Danger." This led the conservative British magazine, *The Economist*, to exclaim, "Mr. Chávez trumped even Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the adolescent stridency of his anti-Americanism." In the same speech, Chávez waved Noam Chomsky's anti-imperialist book, *Hegemony or Survival*, in front of television cameras, sending the title back onto bestseller lists. Chávez symbolizes, for many on the Left, a newly emboldened confrontation with the naked imperial hubris of the US under Bush.

With the astronomical flow of oil money driving Venezuela's economy, Chávez has spread wealth domestically and internationally, including a whole host of projects benefiting poor majorities in Cuba, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia and Jamaica, while more symbolically providing help to poor communities in the US.

Chávez has been a leading opponent of free trade deals between the US and Latin America, promoting instead cooperation among Latin American countries based on principles of solidarity, and invoking the memory of independence hero Simón Bolívar and a united South America. Inspired by the Cuban revolution, Chávez has a warm friendship with Fidel Castro, even while he stresses the inde-



Rally in Venezuela

pendence of the Venezuelan path toward a 21st century socialism, which he vaguely suggests will be less state-centred and more pluralistic. Chávez also frequently expresses the necessity of forging stronger South-South connections to counter the imperialism of the core capitalist states of the world system. Soon after the 2005 Bolivian election of Evo Morales, Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia signed a Peoples' Trade Agreement. At the same time, sharing as it does the contradictions of Third World nationalist regimes of times past, Chávez's anti-imperialism has also led him to forge alliances with reprehensible authoritarian regimes such as those of Iran and Belarus.

At home, the official mythology of Venezuela as a "racial democracy" has been ripping apart at the seams. This is evident in the anti-chavista camp's racist vitriol that litters its political campaigns. Heiber Barreto Sánchez writes, " 'Indian, monkey, and thick-lipped' have been some of the more illustrative expressions of this racial contempt that the opposition has played when describing Chávez. What is forgotten is that the majority of us Venezuelans carry at least one of these

features and by attempting to discredit them politically in this manner they are attacking the sentiments of a large part of the population." Chávez's proud self-identification as "Indian," "black" or "mixed-breed" undermines such attacks, exposing them as racist. The identification of the poor, darker-skinned majority with Chávez has to do in part with the symbolic challenge he represents: he is one of us, our president. And they – the imperial giant to the North and the light-skinned elite in and around Caracas – hate him feverishly, which has to be a good thing!

A similar symbolism is at work in Bolivia with the election of the first indigenous president since the 1825 founding of the republic. Because over 62 percent of Bolivians self-identify as indigenous, Morales' victory is akin to Nelson Mandela's 1994 victory in South Africa, inspiring indigenous movements throughout Latin America, and to some degree in North America as well.

The Morales regime has spurred the poor indigenous majority's expectations for fundamental change after the last six years of courageous and mass struggle by Left-indigenous movements, promising to end the colonialist relations between the white-mestizo (mixed-race) elite and the oppressed indigenous nations through a profound, democratic revolu-

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tion. Morales also says that the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS, or Movement Towards Socialism) government represents a fundamental challenge to the right-wing neoliberal economic model, introduced to Bolivia in 1985. Anti-imperialism, anti-neoliberalism, social justice, indigenous liberation, and a nuanced, multicultural Bolivian nationalism constitute the ideological pillars tying the Morales presidency to his mass support.

In this article, however, I move beyond the imagery and theatrics of the Bolivian and Venezuelan governments and unearth some of the contradictions beneath the surface, paying particular attention to the Venezuelan case.

VENEZUELA UNDER CHÁVEZ

Beginning with the Caracazo rebellion that was brutally repressed in 1989, followed by two failed coup attempts in 1992, the old order in Venezuela began to deteriorate, but what replaced it was unclear. Chávez was elected on an imprecise anti-neoliberal and anti-corruption platform in 1998. His first years in office did not show signs of a serious break with the old economic order, much less a move toward socialism.

However, two important processes were initiated that allowed for the eventual radicalization of the Bolivarian Revolution so that today it does seem revolutionary, even if we remain uncertain of its ultimate direction and depth. First, Chávez wrestled back control of the oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, Sociedad Anónima, which while nominally a state-owned enterprise had long functioned as an independent capitalist entity. The reassertion of state control over PDVSA, as well as Chávez's early efforts to steer Venezuela into a leading role in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, allowed the new government to benefit from the increased price of oil on the world market. Gross Domestic Product grew by an incredible 18 percent in 2004 and by 9.9 percent in 2005. Oil revenue increased from US\$226 per capita in 1998 to \$728 in 2005.

A second factor in the radicalization of the Chávez regime was the right-wing opposition's long march to self-destruction. Historian Greg Grandin sums up

the situation: "Blind to Chávez's popularity among the heretofore invisible urban poor and counselled by hard-liners in the Bush administration, the opposition launched a series of maximalist actions to drive him from power, including an April 2002 coup attempt, a two-month oil strike that cost the country \$6 billion, and an August 2004 recall vote. Chávez beat back this campaign and emerged from the crisis years greatly strengthened, with . . . his adversaries in the military, police, and unions removed from office, and his bond with the poor strengthened. The corporate print and TV media, which not only sided with Chávez's enemies but roused them to action, lost its credibility as a tribune of public trust and could credibly be dismissed by government supporters as an instrument

Venezuelans, or 10% of the adult population. According to Michael Lebowitz, "The new cooperatives . . . are destined to be small and not likely (certainly at their outset) to be major sources of accumulation and growth. Nevertheless, in their emphasis upon replacing the system of wage-labour with one based upon cooperation and collective property, they are a microcosm of an alternative to the logic of capital."

However, he adds, "worker management in what are called 'strategic' state industries has moved backward, and these reversals have demoralized revolutionary workers; confining them to the adversarial role that they play in capitalism, it reinforces all the self-oriented tendencies of the old society." Wilpert also highlights the expropriation by the

The class struggle from above against moderate reforms initiated by the Chávez regime spurred class struggle from below in workplaces and communities, pushing those once-moderate reform measures toward a more direct confrontation with the logic of capital.

of a self-interested and revanchist oligarchy."

The class struggle from above against moderate reforms initiated by the Chávez regime spurred class struggle from below in workplaces and communities, pushing those once-moderate reform measures toward a more direct confrontation with the logic of capital.

ADVANCE AND CONTRADICTION IN VENEZUELA

Anti-capitalist characteristics of the revolutionary process in Venezuela are evident on several fronts. Non-private forms of ownership and control of production (cooperatives, co-management experiments, and expanded state-ownership and management) have steadily increased. Caracas-based sociologist and journalist Gregory Wilpert remarks that there were 800 cooperatives in 1998 compared to over 100,000 in 2005, involving over 1.5 million

state of idle factories in plants that produce paper, valves and agricultural products, and in which workers have taken control. Another 700 idle production facilities are vulnerable to such arrangements in the future.

Meanwhile, redistributive measures introduced by the state and lubricated by oil wealth have financed some rural and urban land reform, social programs such as health and education and subsidized parts of the economy targeted as nuclei of "endogenous development."

Many Left observers rightfully praise the participatory conception of democracy outlined in the new Venezuelan constitution. They point to the important roles of participatory mechanisms in the management of social programs, especially through the various "missions" in poor neighbourhoods, as well as, writes Wilpert, "institutionalized mechanisms for civil society involvement in government (referenda, selection of high-

level state officials, and citizen audits of state institutions)."

Yet, as Lebowitz contends, significant obstacles to socialist democracy internal to the Bolivarian project remain: "The economic revolution, in short, has begun in Venezuela but the political revolution (which began dramatically with the new constitution but requires the transformation of the state into one in which power comes from below) and the cultural revolution (which calls for a serious assault on the continuing patterns of corruption and clientalism) lag well behind." While the poor majority, especially women, have been the primary beneficiaries of redistributive policies, "for some Chavists who want Chávez without socialism, the process has gone far enough. To the extent, then, that there is resistance to decision-making from below (whether in workplaces or communities), the self-development of people will advance only through struggle."

With this in mind, it's useful to point out three areas in which struggle from below is seeking to alter the balance of forces.

First, in early 2006 Chávez enacted a "communal council law." The new councils are structured on 200 to 400 families in urban areas and 20-50 in rural areas and coordinate the activities of local missions, urban land and cultural committees. Lebowitz suggests these councils "provide a basis not only for the transformation of people in the course of changing circumstances but also for productive activity which really is based upon communal needs and communal purposes... it creates the space for the self-development of revolutionary subjects."

A second and fundamental development was the 2003 formation of the National Union of Venezuelan Workers (UNT) replacing the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers, long a conservative force aligned with the far Right. The UNT is a pluralistic confederation, with a sizable minority uncritically supportive of the Chávez government, and a majority who stress the importance of autonomy from the government for the workers' movement and the need to battle from below for the deepening of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Internal battles within the UNT

surfaced in the federation's first congress, which aimed to establish concrete democratic structures to facilitate active control from below. According to a report in *International Socialism*, national coordinator Marcela Maspero argued against holding union elections in order to focus on the Chávez presidential election in December. "When it became clear that the majority of the delegates were strongly in favour of elections, her tendency walked out with three others, taking about a third of the 3,000 delegates." However, the majority position, the report continues, "insisted that the campaign to get 10 million votes for Chávez was very important in isolating the pro-imperialist opposition and the big capitalist interests that back it, but that should not prevent the establishment of the UNT as an authentic, democratically controlled expression of the feelings and interests of Venezuela's millions of private and public sector workers. After all, Venezuela remains a capitalist country, where the same capitalists who tried to overthrow Chávez continue to control major means of production, and multinationals continue to work with the state to exploit its oil and mineral reserves."

A third development was the formation of the Party of Revolution and Socialism (PRS). During the lead up to the formation of the party in 2005, a key protagonist in the effort, Stalin Pérez Borges, told the French newspaper *Rouge*: "The population has acquired – this is a characteristic of the process – a certain amount of power. It is no longer possible for either leaders, ministers or bosses to impose anything on them. . . . Some members of the government think that co-management [conceived as workers' control] is a risk, because enterprises that are strategically important, for example PDVSA (the nationalized oil company), must remain under the control of the country's leaders. In reality, they are afraid of participation by ordinary people. We are working a lot on these experiences of workers' control. Giving power to ordinary people, that can be the leap forward that is needed for the pursuit of the revolutionary process."

Both the UNT and the PRS will participate in the re-election of Chávez this December, Pérez Borges explained to

the Spanish journal *Viento Sur*, but they will undertake parallel and simultaneous efforts to mobilize autonomously to deepen the revolutionary process, deepen and extend workers' control over various enterprises and fight against conservative forces within chavismo. A more profound contradiction is forming, he suggests, as popular sectors in Venezuela renew their struggles from below and demand solutions to fundamental economic and social problems that persist, while bureaucratic sectors of government extend control of important positions within the administration. The year 2007, assuming Chávez's re-election, will be an important measure of the advance or retreat of the Bolivarian Revolution.

RETREAT AND CONTRADICTION IN BOLIVIA

In Bolivia, between 2000 and 2005, Left-indigenous forces mounted a fierce, rural and urban attack against the neoliberal capitalist model and indigenous oppression. Levels of self-organization of the popular classes and oppressed indigenous nations were unparalleled in the Western hemisphere. The slum of El Alto, with its "relocated" indigenous miners and recent Aymara migrants from the rural Andean altiplano (high plateau), has been described as the most revolutionary slum in all of Latin America. Yet, the revolutionary wave of mobilizations was successfully demobilized and channelled into the electoral victory of MAS, led by Evo Morales, despite the fact that MAS played only a marginal, and often destructive role in the popular movements, and indeed worked in a coalition with the neoliberal government of Carlos Mesa during 2004 and parts of 2005.

Predictably, the first eight months of the MAS government saw the continuation of neoliberal economic policy in the mining sector as well as in basic macro-economic financial policies, and extremely limited reforms in the areas of agriculture and natural gas and oil. The revolutionary Constituent Assembly demanded by social movements has turned out to closely resemble a regular parliamentary system.

Nonetheless, August and September illustrated that the far Right, located principally in the resource-rich depart-

SEE BOLIVIA: PAGE 24

COALITION AGAINST ISRAELI APARTHEID

Conference a success

From October 6 to 9, an important conference, *The Struggle Continues: Boycotting Israeli Apartheid*, was held in Toronto. Organized by the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA), the conference drew about 600 over the course of the weekend. The goal of the conference organizers is to win as broad support as possible for a national boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign capable of challenging Israeli apartheid and the support for it by the Canadian state.

CAIA was initially formed by a group of activists that had come together to protest a visit in November 2005 by then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Organizers drew 200 to a public event and over 250 to a lively demonstration against Sharon. In the wake of this successful model of public education and action, the organizing groups decided to work together in support of the Palestinian struggle. There was agreement to focus on the apartheid nature of the Israeli state and CAIA was launched, adopting the Palestine call for a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel as its basis of unity.

The timeliness and resonance of this initiative was confirmed by the success of the conference. Participants included activists from unions, university campuses, various Palestine support groups and other community organizations. A few activists from across Canada and the US were at the conference as well as a number of guests from Palestine support groups in Palestine, South Africa and the

Britain. A significant number of unions were represented, although, with the exception of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3903, few unions sent local activists.

One recurrent theme was the parallel between the current initiative and the historic movement to end apartheid in South Africa. The discussion pointed to one problem in the anti-South African apartheid movement, its failure to make links to other Left-wing social movements.

Another issue stressed was the importance of politically isolating the Israeli state. The fact that Israel is vulnerable to an academic boycott provides an excellent opportunity for campus activists to do political work around this issue.

Overall the meeting was a big success but not without some issues for future discussion and education. There was a reluctance to offer political criticism of organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas.

And an important challenge facing the struggle against Israeli apartheid will be to make it clear that anti-Semitism must not be tolerated. We oppose the Israeli state, not the Jewish people.

Clearly, there is much work to be done in building a strong divestment campaign and in sharpening our political understanding of the issues raised in the process.

To get involved with CAIA, e-mail endapartheid@riseup.net or go to the website at www.caiaweb.org. ★

Bolivia

Continued from Page 23

ments of Santa Cruz and Tarija, and the Amazonian departments of Pando and Beni, are unwilling to accept even the most moderate of reforms. Fairly reliable information suggests coup plotting by the Right is well advanced, and a right-wing military overthrow of Morales may be attempted before this article goes to press.

Recently 16 or 17 miners were killed in the western community of Huanuni when cooperativistas, or petit-bourgeois independent-cooperative miners who have an interest in privatizing the entire mining industry in alliance with transnational mining corporations, attacked state-employed miners, historically the vanguard of the revolutionary Left in Bolivia. Exchanges of gunfire and dynamite left a trail of carnage, as calls from the state-employed miners and the Bolivian Workers Central for the government to send in the military to protect the miners went unanswered.

The most alarming development is to be found in a report by Heinz Dieterich, a well-known German-Mexican political analyst and advisor to the Chávez regime. Dieterich writes that a few weeks ago officials in the Bolivian police approached generals in the armed forces about the possibility of a jointly orchestrated coup d'état. (The conspiracy was apparently leaked to Morales.)

Both counter-revolutionary repression and revolutionary upsurge from below are possibilities at the moment. Ideally, the far Left and indigenous organizations would seek expanded forms of grassroots power, and prepare grounds for a general strike. Such configurations of popular power demanding arms from the MAS government to protect it from onslaught from the Right, as well as efforts to dissuade important sectors of the military and police from taking part in any such coup attempt, could circumvent counter-revolutionary advance, and, at the same time, force the Bolivian path in an increasingly revolutionary direction.

Unfortunately, such forms of popular power are not as visible as they once were, and Left currents within MAS are not explicitly organized with coherent political programs, but rather comprise loose coalitions orbiting around various individuals in the party. Nevertheless, the levels of self-organization of the exploited and oppressed has been extraordinary in recent years, and even vice-president Álvaro García Linera early this month signalled the possibility of having to call on the masses for armed defence against the Right. Even if, as some are predicting, a coup is attempted soon and organized sectors from below are not yet armed, it could still be defeated by the same means the April 2002 coup attempt in Venezuela was defeated: by spontaneous unarmed uprisings in the urban slums – in Bolivia the countryside would also be key – and the defection from the would-be coupist faction in the armed forces by factions loyal to the government (or those simply loyal to the poor indigenous majority of the population). ★

Confronting the 'settler problem'

Thoughts on Indigenous solidarity organizing in "Victoria"

BY JOANNE CUFFE

I had the chance to spend a month in Zapatista autonomous territory two years ago. When I came back I realized that I knew nothing about Indigenous peoples' resistances on this island where I live. I began to acknowledge my own implication as a settler in an ongoing colonial context, and began my own decolonization process.

While many non-Indigenous activists support Indigenous peoples' self-determination abroad, such as in Tibet or Chiapas, they often become more reluctant when the issue is the closer to home. I realized that if I did not start organizing around indigenous issues here in Canada, then I might continue being relatively comfortable with my own settler status. Another settler, Jude Coates, and I decided to start up an anti-colonial group where we could learn and take action in an appropriate, reciprocal way with local Nations. Chiinuuk, a Nuuchah-nulth activist, agreed to be my mentor.

The Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Working Group (IPSWG) was founded in the fall of 2005. Our purpose is "to create opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members to participate in education and action against colonization and in support of Indigenous peoples' inherent right to self-determination and self-governance of Indigenous territory." IPSWG remains an open, mixed group that did not start with a particular ideology - our only commitment is to the mandate that we communally wrote.

For the first while, many people in the group wanted to support any struggle that was brought to the group's attention. At the end of May IPSWG agreed to focus on local issues. Although coordinated trans-national solidarity campaigns can definitely be important, it is a differ-

ent commitment to build relationships over time with the people whose territory you are on.

There is less accountability with "drop-in" support, as it is possible to go into a community when the heat is on, only to leave when things get messy or inconvenient. In contrast to solidarity campaigns that are pre-made elsewhere, local movements require effort, trust and a deep understanding of local history. Local issues tend to be less glamorous and more confrontational for both settlers and indigenous people.



PHOTO BY JOANNE CUFFE

IPSWG members with Wsawec Nation youth protecting a local mountain.

THE SETTLER PROBLEM

In this work I have been reminded that settlers need to learn through discomfort, be self-reflective and put things in their broader systemic context, instead of being stuck in various forms of denial, defensiveness or taking things too personally.

Colonialism and imperialism affect us all, but in different ways. People need to renew their own values and principles and live their own backgrounds and

heritage. It is important for settlers to figure out our own ways of reflecting, being balanced and giving thanks, without appropriating other peoples' forms of spirituality.

Settlers are often hampered by guilt or uncertainty about what to focus on. But there are plenty of targets for decolonizing our societies, including racist attitudes and structures, as well as colonial governments and corporations - which together form the "settler problem." I am personally committed to building alliances in the political and ethical common ground between the struggles of indigenous peoples and anarchists.

UNLEARNING COLONIALISM

By the end of the fall, after conflicts in the group, it became apparent that most of the white settlers in IPSWG needed to simultaneously work through their prejudices and privileges while continuing with active organizing. The group set up a decolonization discussion group in January to unlearn oppressive behaviour and colonial mentalities, and to hold each other accountable for our personal commitments.

We've had to address internal issues of confidentiality, tokenism and exoticizing of people of colour, members speaking from outside of their own experiences or on a solely academic level, and racist comments during meetings and actions. We've also had to confront the settlers' privilege in being able to take time out when overwhelmed, while countless indigenous people have been resisting and addressing these issues non-stop.

I have been organizing since I was 13 with various collectives around social and environmental justice issues; however, I did not begin to feel my work had been effective until IPSWG got underway. It has been an honour to share what I have been learning over the past year in confronting the "settler problem." ★

Joanne Cuffe is a member of the Wasáse movement, and a founding member of IPSWG. More information about IPSWG: <http://www.vipirg.ca/ipswg/home.html>.



Wasáse FAQs

COMPILED BY WENDY HART-ROSS (ININEW)
AND DEBORAH SIMMONS (SETTLER)

Since the formation of the new Wasáse movement and the publication of the "Indigenous Resurgence" issue of *New Socialist* magazine, Wasáse members and supporters have been asked many questions about the movement and its principles. Here are our responses.

What is Wasáse and when was it formed?

The word Wasáse is the Kanienkeha (Mohawk) word for the ancient war dance ceremony of unity, strength and commitment to action. The Wasáse movement is inspired by the book of that name by Kanien'kehaka scholar and activist Taiaiake Alfred. The book seeks to capture and convey a new "warrior" spirit: an attitude, a way of being in the world. The movement was formed to enable indigenous peoples to live authentic, free and healthy lives in our homelands. At the Indigenous Leadership forum in June of this year, a gathering of people discussed the ideas of Wasáse and developed a Statement of Principles, the basis of unity for a new radical indigenous movement. There were 32 people from across the continent who made a formal commitment to building the movement. As we go to press, 86 indige-

nous people from 26 indigenous nations have registered public support for Wasáse principles.

What is the relationship between Wasáse and the New Socialist Group?

The Wasáse movement invites the support of non-indigenous people and organizations who share its principles and commitments. The struggle for self-determination can only be strengthened through solidarity among people who oppose the Canadian colonial-settler state and the global capitalist system of which it is an imperialist component. The New Socialist Group supports the autonomous organizing of indigenous peoples for self-determination. In working to renew socialism from below as part of today's struggles, socialists have much to learn from Wasáse's principled and transformative struggle for freedom from colonialism and the other forms of oppression intertwined with it.

What is the role of youth in the Wasáse movement? How does Wasáse address the high rates of suicide and addictions among indigenous youth?

The Wasáse movement taps into the widespread frustration and anger of young indigenous people, and provides a framework for turning this to disciplined action. The core leadership of Wasáse consists of youth; in fact, it can be called a youth movement. Many young people have recognized that the institutions imposed by the colonial system, including band councils and the Assembly of First Nations, are not able to deliver on their promises for a better future. Exploitation of the land for profit is leading to the permanent destruction of the resources inherited from our ancestors. Youth are left to drift in communities, without any sense of identity or direction. The Wasáse movement aims to restore indigenous traditions and engage in political action that can give a sense of empowerment to our youth.

What is the focus of Wasáse organizing and action?

Wasáse is engaged in the development of ideas through public discussion, and it supports direct action. Our starting point is our responsibility to address issues affecting our own communities, and to raise awareness and build grassroots action at a local level. Our most important source of power is the knowledge drawn from our own language, our traditional governance systems, our elders and our relationship with our traditional territories. In building solidarity among the nations, we build upon our diverse strengths, and come to understand the struggles we have in common. We also aim to address the violence that affects our families, and relationships between women and men. This division caused by colonialism weakens our communities and is an obstacle to liberation. We defend our territory from further appropriation and destruction, and we defend our traditional harvesting rights. ★

JOIN THE WASÁSE MOVEMENT

For information on upcoming Wasáse events, check our website, www.wasase.org. Email contact@wasase.org with your full names, indigenous affiliation and/or place of residence, and email address to register support for the movement. Supporters are listed on the Wasáse website, and can request to be subscribed to the To:ske listserve, a forum for information-sharing and discussions related to the Wasáse movement.

WASÁSE ACTIONS TO DATE

- ★ Speakout against the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in conjunction with the AFN Assembly, Vancouver, July 12.
- ★ Support for actions organized by Inter-Tribal Coalition to Defend Mato Paha (Bear Butte, South Dakota), August 7-13.
- ★ Speakout on "The Spirit and Intent of the Treaties" in conjunction with the National Indian Treaties 1-11 Gathering, Vancouver, August 2.
- ★ Wasáse On the Prairies, Saskatoon, October 26.
- ★ Wasáse Radio, www.aboriginalradio.com (in progress).



COMMUNIQUE #1

JULY 11, 2006

On the occasion of the Assembly of First Nations Election,
July 10-11, 2006.

TO ALL INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Sisters and Brothers:

The Assembly of First Nations and other "national aboriginal organizations" are not the true voice of the original people of this land. The National Chief of the AFN and the other band council chiefs who participate in the Indian Affairs system are not our leaders. They exist and function under the authority of the Government of Canada. They do not speak for our people.

The band councils have divided our communities, corrupted our culture, and spread white-minded thinking among the people. They have weakened our nations and have served as tools for the Settlers to steal our lands and impose their rules on us. The loss of land and the denial of nationhood is the root cause of the suffering among our people. They are threatening our existence as nations.

Band councils and the national aboriginal organizations are funded by and answer to the Settlers. The role of band councils is to administer moneys and to manage programs and services that are funded by the colonial government. Band councils and national aboriginal organizations are parts of the Indian Affairs system. They are Canadian institutions accountable to Canadians, and they do not answer to us. They are not our governments.

Brothers and Sisters:

We reject the authority of the AFN and other national aboriginal organizations and the band council chiefs, and we deny the legitimacy of the Indian Act. The time has come to rebel against the colonial system and its leaders, its structures and its power. We call on you in the spirit of the ancestors to join with us in a rebellion of indigenous truth so that our people and the land may survive.

From sacred land in all four directions of Turtle Island.

Angela Grier, Piikani Nation, Blackfoot Confederacy • Dianne Buchan/Anuatin, Oji-Cree • Brock Pitawanakwat, Anishnaabe • Chiinuuks (Ruth Ogilvie), Tla-oqui-aht & Checlesaht Nuw-chah-nulth • Darlene Rose Okemaysim, Beardy's & Okemasis First Nation • Glen Coulthard, Yellowknives Dene • Jackie Price, Inuk, Nunavut • Jusquan (Amanda Bedard), Haida • Kawennyohstha (Nicole Martin), Kanien'kehaka • Kowennakon (Bonnie Whittlow), Kanien'kehaka • Menetia (Elisha Elliot), Wjolelp, Wsanec • Michelle Daigle, Ininew • Hupaltheatuk (Sandra Howard), Mowachah • Ha'wilt'h'ap (David Dennis), Nuw-chah-nulth • Na'cha'uaht (Cliff Atleo, Jr.), Ahousaht & Kitselas • N'xwuxqpt (Robert Sterling), N'sist • Sahonwese Elijah, Kanien'kehaka • Sakej (James Ward), Mi'kmaq • Sarah Dickie, Dene & Stó:lo • Sunka Wakan Num Obnain (Chris Standing), Dakota • Taiiake (Gerald Alfred), Kanien'kehaka • Tala Baawaating (Estrella Whetung), Mississauga Nishnaabekwe & Lucbanin • Tizot (Georgina Olsen), Wsanec • Wendy Hart-Ross, Ininew, Kinosa Sipí & Pimicikamak • Xumthoult (Nick Claxton), Tsawout, Wsanec • Yadultin (Marilyn Jensen), Dakaa Tlingit & Tagish Kwaan ★

THE RETURN OF RED POWER BY DAVID McNALLY

Celebrating the Wasáse Movement

IT IS A MOMENT FOR CELEBRATION, reflection, nurturing and debate. Such were my initial reactions to the special issue of *New Socialist* on Indigenous Resurgence.

Celebration, surely, for the emergence of the Wasáse movement represents for the first time in decades the development of an autonomous, radical, dynamic new voice of indigenous resistance. The Wasáse movement is the rightful heir of the Red Power movement of the 1970s. At the same time, it has already taken significant steps beyond that movement, particularly in its embrace of indigenous feminism. To have confronted the issue of sexual violence is testimony to the courage of the movement's originators.

More than this, the movement's willingness to identify with anti-capitalism puts it in synch with the most important movements for global justice today. And its readiness to learn from and adapt tactics of ungovernability from indigenous struggles in Ecuador, Bolivia and Mexico signifies an inspiring transnation-

alist impulse. The same is true of the willingness to identify issues of class inequality and working class interests within indigenous communities.

What a potent mix: the anti-colonial theorizing of Frantz Fanon, radical socialism, indigenous feminism, class and anti-racist analysis. If the Wasáse movement can bring these into a theoretical synthesis and a practical politics, it will emerge as a real force to be reckoned with.

And this is where reflection will come in. Real movements need an enduring commitment to deepening analysis and popular education. As new challenges of theory and practice emerge, perspectives must be refined, early formulations revisited and reworked. The crucial idea of "critical traditionalism" gets right to the heart of this. The Wasáse movement embraces crucial indigenous traditions, but in a critical spirit in which tradition is reworked as a living force in the present.

Then comes nurturing. Living, breathing radical movements need patient encouragement and attention. Individ-

uals need to find hope and energy through their participation. They need to know that their contributions are valued. And everyone involved needs inspiration derived from collective work. Authentic movements need the energizing effects of solidarity in struggle. They need to test what alliances work, and which tactics fortify activists.

And debate underpins all of this. After all, every individual activist brings their own partial experiences to the movement. These experiences, leavened by memory, history and analysis, contribute to the picture of the world with which the movement operates. But how these pieces fit together, what can best be learned from them requires an unceasing conversation and debate. And none of this is possible without open, democratic, participatory processes.

I offer these initial reflections as someone utterly inspired by this collection of articles, interviews, reviews and statements. The spirit of liberation is at work in the Wasáse movement. Seeds of revolt are being planted, winds of change stirred up. A new politics of indigenous resurgence has emerged. Long live the Wasáse movement. ★

URBAN SPRAWL IN WINNIPEG

BY RICHARD MILGROM

PHOTOS: RICHARD MISGROM



Two views of Winnipeg.

The city as growth machine

In early May of this year, Winnipeg mayor Sam Katz hosted a City Summit aimed at developing a strategy for local “economic, social and infrastructure development.” The list of invitees was closed and secretive, dominated by business interests. Significantly, former New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani, renowned for his brutal law-and-order regime, was a keynote speaker at the event.

The City Summit intersected with “Operation Charging Bison,” an urban military exercise aimed at preparing 500 of Canadian troops for conflict in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. This complemented the renewed aggression of Winnipeg police in “Operation Clean Sweep,” initiated last November in response to a moral panic about gang violence.

Winnipeg city leaders, including mayoral candidates in the October municipal election, are clearly aiming to make this city a safe home – for capital investment. This is reflected in a continuing strategy for suburban expansion that benefits suburban “home builders,” and leaves the neighbourhoods of the poor crumbling.

In Winnipeg, the widening gap between rich and poor is not just

economic, but also geographical. Alternative mayoral candidates addressed the need to rejuvenate the centre of the city, including the need to increase the population living downtown. However, only Marianne Cerelli strongly advocated stopping sprawl. But she lost decisively to Katz.

The city’s population has grown about 1% almost every year since the 1950s. Winnipeg is what some call a slow-growth city. But this moniker only applies to the city’s population. The geographic reality is quite the opposite: while the population grew by only 34% between 1960 and 1990, the size of the city’s urbanized area doubled. The trend to outward sprawl has only increased since that time, while the centre of the city continues to decline.

This pattern is not unusual. Cities and regions all over North America have faced similar problems. Cities like Buffalo, New York and Cleveland, Ohio have lost significant proportions of their populations over the last few decades, while the suburban municipalities that surround them have experienced at least modest growth. What is unusual, perhaps even unique about Winnipeg is that urban sprawl is largely located within one municipality.

GROWTH COALITIONS

Although there is a burgeoning literature on the fiscal costs of sprawl, including the increasing per capita costs of the

infrastructure necessary to support development, research about the social costs of sprawl is only just starting to emerge.

The sprawl of places like Winnipeg seems to defy logic, and many rationalizations are provided – the most common being the “demands of the market.” And it is tempting to argue that neoliberalism prevalent at all levels of government is dictating a simplistic “private-sector-knows-best” attitude that commodifies the city, rather than working for the public good.

But a review of the actors involved suggests that governments have a more active role. Harvey Molotch argued in 1976 that cities are “growth machines” in which coalitions of actors manipulate local politics and land development to promote economic growth and the accumulation of wealth. Social justice and the public good are not at the top of the agenda for these “growth coalitions.” The close relationships between developers, builders and politicians described by Molotch has been reflected in development practices in Winnipeg, and his analysis seems even more appropriate today.

WAVERLY WEST

Over the past year, there has been much hand wringing about the continued decline of Winnipeg’s downtown core. But the troubles with the downtown have usually been treated in isolation, rather than in relation to broader urban development patterns.

Richard Milgrom teaches City Planning at the University of Manitoba, and is Chair of Planners Network, www.plannersnetwork.org.

In a slow growth city, rapid expansion of the suburbs removes people, commercial activity and amenities from the centre. The results can be devastating.

The controversial new Waverly West development exemplifies the short-sited profit motive that has driven urban development in Winnipeg. In this and many other cases, the prospect of short term economic gain has eclipsed consideration of long-term effects, or even more immediate impacts on the immediate surroundings.

Waverly West is a new "community" planned for the southwest edge of the city. It will have up to 11,000 households when completed and will have its own commercial centre. Advocates for the development are arguing for the building of a new major arterial road (perhaps even an expressway) to provide access for the residents.

The developers and the city tout Waverly West as an innovative suburb that will be "walkable" and encourage more sustainable living. They also claim that this development is necessary to rejuvenate the downtown core!

The city and the province (much of the land is now provincially owned) support Waverly West by referring to a residential land supply study that concludes the number of serviced lots available for house builders will soon run out.

The plan is heralded in press releases from both levels of government and the developers as representing the leading edge in progressive design. Supposedly the plan is pedestrian friendly because it has "greenways" separated from the roadways; it will support sustainable energy by allowing for geothermal heating systems; and it will follow standards of "visitability" that require all houses to be wheelchair accessible.

But the design benefits in accessibility and environmental friendliness are contradicted by the geographic spread that will effectively make residents car-dependent. Low density development is a known obstacle to efficient public transit. And though the wheelchair accessibility of the houses is laudable, the refusal of the City to require sidewalks makes the neighbourhood effectively inaccessible to pedestrian and wheelchair traffic alike.

FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

The study makes a number of assumptions that should be questioned. It assumes, for example, that the "market" will continue to demand the same sort of houses that are being built now: predominantly single-family detached, in low density neighbourhoods. This is despite the fact that the size of households is decreasing steadily, from 3.7 in 2001 to a predicted 2.4 in 2011.

In looking at existing available sites, the report counts only "vacant" land and does not take into account underutilized land – of which there is plenty within the existing urban area.

As the city spreads out to accommodate developments like this, the infrastructure that supports it is being stretched, and the centre of the city is still suffering as a result.

Some politicians, developers and planners argue that the suburban taxes are supporting programs in the inner city. And in the short term, this may be true. Winnipeg is in a fairly unusual position

*The argument that growth
is needed to pay for
what we already have
makes little sense as
a long-term strategy.*

of having higher property taxes in the suburbs than downtown (at least in part because most of the suburbs are in the same municipality).

However, the argument that growth is needed to pay for what we already have makes little sense as a long-term strategy. In the final analysis, stretching the infrastructure outward only makes the city more expensive to maintain.

SOCIAL COSTS

The same applies to social infrastructure. For example, as households have abandoned the centre of the city, schools have become underutilized and, as a result, some have been closed. At the same time new schools must be built to accommodate the families that are locating on the city's periphery.

Another example, which was hot in the Winnipeg press, is found in the old system of community centres, many of which require millions of dollars worth of renovation. The City is currently considering closing many community centres and consolidating services into a few larger recreation centres.

In some cases, users of the new facilities, including small children, will have to cross major arterial roads to get to the centres. The City, however, believes that this is a more cost effective way to deliver recreational programs, and the idea of community seems to have been misplaced from the agenda.

Recent press releases from the provincial government have stated that the sale of suburban lands is beneficial for the city core. Proceeds from these sales, it reports, will be funnelled back into inner city neighbourhoods. For now, one million dollars from the sale of lands for the Royalwoods suburb is being made available to inner city communities.

This is almost laughable. While the new suburbs continue to siphon off population (voters), commercial activity and social amenities, sops are being offered in return. One million would build only a handful of houses, repair no more than a few roads and sidewalks and contribute little to suffering social programs. Worse still, inner city communities will be required to compete for a share of the money.

Waverly West is only the largest of the current subdivision proposals in Winnipeg. Other proposals are working their way through the approvals process with little public opposition.

The picture appears rather bleak. Perhaps changes in attitude will not happen until rising oil prices actually make suburban living undesirable.

But I believe there is room for optimism. Opposition to conventional development practices is growing, and coalitions of activist groups are forming to argue for alternatives.

Activist groups are planning their own alternative city summit for the fall. This and other activities will be timed to push social and environmental justice issues onto the agenda for the coming municipal elections. ★

Why left electoralism isn't enough

The following article is based on a talk given **BY DAVID MANDEL** to introduce a discussion held in Montreal on March 16, 2006 among members of Quebec Solidaire (QS), the new left-wing party in Quebec. The event was organized by the Montreal collective of Presse-toi-à-gauche (www.pressegauche.org).

IN THE UFP (ONE OF THE PARTIES THAT merged to form QS) we used to say we were a “party of the ballot box and of the street.” But there was never any discussion of what that meant. Nor was it clear why an electoral, parliamentary party wasn't enough. Yet these are fundamental questions for the Left.

I'll begin with the following observation: all the left parties that have formed governments over the past twenty years have ended up by bowing to neo-liberal orthodoxy, even while trying, usually without much success, to give it a “social” hue. The list of these governments is long and includes, among others, Lula's in Brazil, Blair's in the UK, Mitterand's in France, Schroeder's in Germany, as well as several provincial NDP governments in Canada. With the exception of Venezuela's Chavez – a special case – no left party in power over the past twenty years has seriously challenged the basic precepts of neo-liberalism.

ELECTORAL DEAD-END

My thesis is that this is inevitable if a party seeking progressive change relies primarily on electoral politics, neglecting or completely rejecting extra-parliamentary political action.

To understand this, one must recognize the huge advantage that liberal (i.e. capitalist) democracy confers on the capitalist class. If I speak of the capitalist class (or capital, or the “business community”), it is because neo-liberalism is an ideology that serves to legitimate policies that promote the interests of the capital-owning class. Some, like one of the UFP's candidates in a recent by-election, might argue that capital's adherence to neo-liberalism is a case of ideological fanaticism, a false consciousness that threatens its own survival. And so, it is not a matter

any more of the old class struggle, but of saving the capitalist class from itself. But supposing that were true – and the idea is highly dubious – what do we do if the capitalist class refuses to be saved? We still have to shift the correlation of class forces.

Let's look first at the advantages capital enjoys within the liberal state institutions, regardless the political colour of the party in power. Capital can always count on a sympathetic hearing from the upper echelons of the public administration, the judiciary, the command of the military and police forces. With few exceptions, these people, upon whom the orderly functioning of any government depends, share the same conservative ideological orientations as the capitalist class. They often belong to the same social milieu.

But these advantages pale when

A left government that relies principally
on electoral performance has to keep within
what is ultimately acceptable to business.

compared to the political resources capital wields outside of the state institutions, within “civil society.” In a capitalist economy, it is the members of the capitalist class who make the main decisions concerning investment and the production and distribution of goods and services. As a result, the health of the economy and of public finances depends on their having confidence in the government's policies. The owners and directors of the mass media belong to that same class and they naturally share its conservative orientations. One can add to the mass media, the multitude of think tanks, public relations firms, titled “experts” and many other avenues for influencing public opinion.

I want to cite, in this connection, an excerpt from a speech that Alcide De Gasperi, leader of the Italian Christian Democratic party, made to his cabinet in 1947. After the war and the overthrow of fascism, which had enjoyed the enthusiastic support of Italy's capitalist class, the Christian Democratic Party tried to base itself upon the so-called middle classes. But De Gasperi quickly understood that the party's real interest lay in winning the unequivocal support of the employers. This is how he explained it to his ministers: “There is in Italy a fourth party, in addition to the Christian Democrats, the Communists, and the Socialists, which is capable of paralyzing and rendering vain any effort, by organizing the sabotage of the national loan, the flight of capital, inflation and the spread of scandal campaigns. Experience has taught me that Italy cannot be governed today unless we bring into the government, in one form or another, the representatives of that fourth party, that disposes of the wealth of the nation and the economic power.”

Imagine that a party like Quebec solidaire gets elected on the basis of a programme that challenges neo-liberal orthodoxy. It would immediately come under crippling ideological and economic pressure from the employers and their domestic and international allies. This is what the editor of the CCPA Monitor, a moderately left publication that generally takes the Scandinavian states as its model, describes as the probable reaction to a Canadian government that broke with NAFTA: “We could expect an immediate threat of mass business shutdowns, layoffs, and outsourcing. ...Our economy could be seriously destabilized, our currency devalued, our unemployment rate tripled. Capital strikes and

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Childcare workers
marching in Quebec
Labour's 2003 Day of
Disruption.

flights could precipitate a crippling depression." And he says nothing of the ideological campaign.

A left party that counts mainly on electoral success and limits itself to the parliamentary struggle couldn't resist for long. It would be forced to seek to restore business confidence by diluting its program. The very prospect of capital's reaction is so intimidating, that left parties over the past 20 years have tended to eliminate measures that seriously challenge neo-liberal logic from their platforms.

The point is that a left government that relies principally on electoral performance has to keep within what is ultimately acceptable to business. In the "golden" thirty postwar years, labour's strength coming out of the depression and war, the rapid economic expansion and high profits made capital somewhat more tolerant. But that changed in the 1980s, and the left's manoeuvring space within what capital will tolerate has narrowed radically.

EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY STRUGGLE

It follows that a party that wants to go beyond neo-liberalism must find strength well beyond what electoralism can provide. It must build active support within society itself that can neutralize and overcome the advantages that liberal democracy gives capital. This brings us to the "party of the street."

Such a party cannot be a mere electoral machine that limits its members' role to preparing and running electoral campaigns. It has to be a political movement. It has to give priority to the active education of its members. They must be able independently and critically to analyse the issues. They have to participate fully in drawing up the party's programme and defining its strategy.

This means that the party has to be profoundly democratic, its leadership at pains to encourage initiatives "from below" and to create space for independent rank-and-file organization. Only that can create the kind of commitment and confidence needed to change society. Only that can make possible real control by the party rank and file of the parliamentary party – always a major problem.

Being a "party of the street" means more than showing up at demonstrations with a banner. The party has to be rooted in the social movements. This is not a matter of "infiltration," often raised as a bogeyman to justify the artificial and harmful division of labour between social democratic parties and social movements, particularly the unions. It means recruiting to the party, educating and organizing left activists of the social movements, so that they can bring into the movements a strategic vision of social transformation, force real debate, and also mobilize support for the party's positions. This

would give the party the means to encourage social struggles that challenge neo-liberal logic and to build genuinely committed support for itself within society.

It is only when the popular classes are organized and fighting to promote their interests that they can create the ideological space and confidence necessary to overcome the pressure of the capitalist class and its allies. Without that, any left party, even if it does manage to get elected with an ambitious program of reform, will end by yielding to the superior forces. This has been confirmed over and over by experience.

To be able to bring positive change, the parliamentary struggle must be supported by extra-parliamentary mobilization. And electoral victories must, in turn, serve to encourage that mobilization. That's what a "party of the ballot box and the street" means.

By extra-parliamentary political struggle, I have in mind actions like the Quebec unions' "day of disruption" in December 2003 against Charest's anti-labour legislation and the student strike of spring 2005. The "water wars" and "gas wars" in Bolivia are probably the most striking recent examples. They brought Evo Morales to power with an absolute majority of the vote, something that had never before been achieved, let alone by a left candidate.

But unless that mobilization continues, Morales will surely disappoint. This is not to cast doubt on his commitment or integrity. It is just being realistic, as Quebec Solidaire's declarations of principles call us to be. ★

LEBANON

Imperial binge and hangover

BY DAVID FINKEL

WHEN THE LORDS OF EMPIRE SET out to show that the United States — not Iran or any other potential rival — will rule the “new” Middle East, they employed the willing regional branch office of the U.S. military-industrial complex, the Israeli Defense Force, reducing Lebanon to ruins. The war began as a triumphal imperial binge, shock-and-awe on steroids; when the carnage ended with a fragile ceasefire, the empire woke up with uncertainty and a hangover.

NS readers already know that the mess isn't just about Lebanon. Stephen Harper has dragged the Canadian people into the bottomless quicksand of Afghanistan, from which no escape is in sight for years if not decades.

Meanwhile, a US military report on Iraq openly admits that Anbar province is now effectively controlled by insurgents, with no possibility of changing the situation without the addition of at least another American division. With domestic public confidence in this war falling below the one-third level, any attempt to add the “necessary” force levels to the Iraq war would risk a meltdown of the military reserves through mass desertion and demoralization.

As far as the Lebanon war goes, the facts are clear enough and well documented. The operation was a long-planned joint US and Israeli strategy, as reported in detail by the *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 21, 2006), awaiting only a pretext to sell it as “a war for Israel's national survival.” The main source for the article was not some maverick or anonymous leak, but a prominent Israeli academic militarist Gerald Steinberg, who boasted that this was the “best-prepared war in Israel's history” with a



The aftermath of Israeli bombing of Lebanese neighbourhoods.

three-week timetable for overwhelming victory.

Further, as Seymour Hersh's reporting in *The New Yorker* reveals, proponents of air power in the Pentagon as well as Dick Cheney envisioned not only smashing Hezbollah in Lebanon, but demonstrating how US air power on a massively greater scale could bring “victory” over Iran.

As it turned out, Israel's Lebanon bombing and expeditionary campaign ended only after five weeks, and with nothing like the promised smashing victory. In this writer's view, in the historical long run, this war will go down as a chapter in a slow-motion Israeli national suicide. Immediately, however, it has meant the destruction of the country of Lebanon; the subjection of its population to starvation in the manner of a medieval siege conducted with state-of-the-art military technology; the greatest oil spill and ecological disaster in the history of the eastern Mediterranean; and — mostly hidden from the headlines — a concentrated murderous Israeli assault on the Palestinian Gaza and West Bank population.

It is not a question of whether it was

the United States or Israel that initiated this slaughter — it was both of them, with closely coinciding interests. The Israeli state's local agenda remains crushing the Palestinian nation, and its regional priority is to demonstrate its value to the imperial superpower in wiping out any potential Arab resistance to US dominance. But the driving factor in prolonging the war was the global agenda of US imperialism. That is why it continued long past the point where the impossibility of “a complete and final defeat and disarming of Hezbollah” was clear.

What was astonishing was the essential failure, after a full month of war, of the Israeli assault. Katyusha rockets were still falling in northern Israel — mostly landing at random, but terrifying the population and crippling economic activity.

As the Israeli antiwar campaigner Uri Avnery observed, both in northern Israel and southern Lebanon it was the poor who lacked the means to leave and were forced to remain behind after the more affluent had packed and fled. Israel employed phosphorus bombs, despite their prohibition under international law, causing untreatable internal burning

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among the victims. And it is feared that toxic pollution from the massive oil spill may ultimately kill more people than the bombing.

For its part, if Hezbollah's rockets had a strategic purpose it was perhaps to force Israel to give up reliance on air power alone and undertake a ground invasion – a scenario that would imply weeks or months of brutal fighting and possibly hundreds of deaths for the invading army. Faced with this prospect, in the second week in August a divided Israeli cabinet – its meetings interrupted so that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert could place phone calls to the US Secretary of State – voted for “a decisive ground operation to the Litani River,” then placed it on hold.

That was roughly where matters stood as the UN cease-fire resolution was adopted – at which point Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz ordered a final full-scale ground operation. It was in those final few hours, when the outcome of the war was an established fact, that the Israeli air force dropped tens of thousands of cluster bombs, freshly delivered from America by rush order, all over the southern Lebanese countryside where they will detonate for years to come.

Why? This late-game war crime was in effect a scorched-earth attempt so that the civilian population would be unable to return, leaving the Israeli military with an extended free-fire zone. The attempt failed, as the civilians violated Israeli orders and began streaming home even before the cease-fire officially began.

WAR CRIMES AND FUTILITY

Put aside, for the moment, the overwhelming weight of the historical record of Israeli aggression against Lebanon. Put aside the fact that an Israeli withdrawal from Shebaa Farms (the piece of Lebanon still occupied by Israel from 1967) and releasing Lebanese prisoners held by Israel would have prevented this horror. Suspend all judgment temporarily on the immediate responsibility for starting the war, and ask instead: Once it began, what made this war continue to the slaughter in Qana, the bombings of farm workers in northern Lebanon, of neighborhoods in south Beirut and civilian convoys, the blockading of aid and creation of total “humanitarian disaster” throughout the country?

One week after the war broke out, several facts were already completely clear. First, Israel could smash anything in Lebanon anytime it chose. Second, Hezbollah was both politically and militarily entrenched and could not be removed by Israeli air or ground power. Third, the Syrian regime could not be isolated or ignored. Fourth, the Iranian regime can't be isolated either – not only because it provides sophisticated weaponry to Hezbollah, but because of the implicit threat that if pushed to the wall, it could give that kind of assistance (as it hasn't so far, for good reasons) to allied militia forces inside Iraq.

In short, everyone's “point” had been made. Even in the lunatic logic of warmaking, then, it was time to use the available machinery (i.e. the United Nations) to move to a quick cease-fire and political negotiations. The primary reason this didn't happen is the US administration – for whom no outcome was acceptable short of 100 percent Hezbollah defeat and surrender. Given its defeat in Iraq, the Bush gang saw Lebanon as the chance to reverse its fortunes, a proxy war to smash the influence of Iran and soften it up for the next round of “regime change.”

To accomplish this absurd dream, Washington is willing to bravely fight to the last Lebanese civilian, and to sacrifice the Lebanese government along with as many Israeli lives as necessary. For three weeks, Bush, Rice and Bolton continued to block any Security Council resolution that didn't “address fundamental issues” – by which they meant crushing any force that can resist the American-ruled “new Middle East” project.

The second reason for the protracted futile war is the tangled state of Israeli politics. For the Israeli military command, the trauma over Hezbollah rockets provided an unusual (short-term) mandate to “go all the way” in Lebanon, to demonstrate Israel's air power. For a coalition government headed by Olmert and his junior partner Peretz, neither of whom have strong military credentials, this war was calculated to restore their stature after the post-“disengagement” drive to starve the people of Gaza failed to produce a Palestinian surrender.

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Canadian state's complicity

The Canadian state has always been a staunch friend of Israel and no friend of the Palestinians. However, on some previous occasions seeking to play a diplomatic role, Canadian governments have attempted to look balanced. Now, under Stephen Harper things have gone from bad to worse.

Harper has become the most strident defender of Israel, outzealoting even George W. Bush. The Harper government was the first to impose collective punishment on the Palestinians by cutting off aid after they exercised their democratic right and voted for Hamas.

As Israeli forces rained death and destruction on Lebanon, Harper maintained Israel was showing “restraint.” This is a shocking descriptions of actions which killed 1500 people, destroyed 30,000 homes and caused one million refugees. As refugees return to the south of Lebanon they risk further death and injury from huge numbers of unexploded Israeli cluster bombs. It is estimated that it will cost a staggering \$50 billion to rebuild Lebanon.

Neither the deaths and destruction nor the ensuing protests have deterred Harper from framing the issue as one of good versus evil—as a democratic Israel against the Hezbollah terrorists backed by Iran.

Israel's Ambassador to Canada strongly praised Canada for its role in the G-8 resolution at St Petersburg in July and the initial UN Security Council Resolution. The G-8 resolution didn't even call for an “immediate ceasefire” and the first UN resolution was completely unacceptable to Lebanon causing further delays to its passage. In short Canada helped prolong Israel's campaign of destruction which cost hundreds of innocent lives.

Now Harper is courting pro-Zionist voters by making the preposterous claim that the Liberals are anti-Israel. This inaccurate claim has purged from mainstream discourse any arguments which assert the necessity for a peaceful resolution to include negotiations with Hezbollah and Hamas. It has also prevented any acknowledgement that war crimes have been perpetrated by Israel against Lebanon.

But Harper's policy is so odious that it will generate a counter reaction. This can create openings for supporters of the rights of the Palestinian and Lebanese people. ★

RESISTANCE IN IRAQ AND LEBANON

Which side are we on?

BY A. SOODANIM

They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there.
You'll either be a union man
Or a scab for J H Blair.

This verse from a militant song from the Kentucky coal fields, written in the early thirties by Florence Reese, a miner's wife, poses a question that was easy to answer for many who heard it. Which side are you on? It was the name of the song and was effective in building support for the miners fighting against exploitation. It became part of Left and union culture and remains so.

Today socialists are confronted by a similar question in the Middle East but with answers more difficult to articulate. Which side are we on? In Afghanistan, Lebanon and Iraq — which side are we on indeed? This article seeks to put the question in the context of the revolutionary socialist and Marxist tradition, a tradition that many in the New Socialist Group see themselves following to one degree or another. That tradition has a long history of taking sides in armed confrontations between nations, between colonial rulers of various sorts and the nations they would oppress and in civil wars between different groups within nations. There are few if any examples of socialists not taking sides, of declaring “a pox on both your houses.”

Marx and Engels were active supporters of forces fighting for national independence in the uprisings of 1848. Marx was an ardent supporter of the Union fighters in the US Civil War, writing an entire volume on it. The Second International supported the Boers against British Colonialism in South Africa during the Boer War — a war that saw Canadian troops sent to assist the British. That war also was the site of the original sin of

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concentration camps, created by the British to imprison the resisting population.

Lenin wrote eloquently on the struggle of the Irish patriots for national independence and also supported the Afghan resistance against British imperialism. In October of 1919, Lenin met with the Afghan ambassador and, as the Minutes published in his collected works show, exchanged the following words: “I am very glad to see in the red capital of the worker and peasant government the representative of the friendly Afghan people who are suffering and fighting



Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah

against imperialist oppression.” To which the Ambassador replied: “I proffer you a friendly hand and hope that you will help the whole of the East to free itself from the yoke of European imperialism.”

In the 1920's, the Soviet government supported the nationalist movement in China, the Kuomintang, against a variety of pro-imperialist forces and the Turkish government of Mustafa Kemal in its war against French and British intervention in the early twenties.

A decade later, Leon Trotsky, then in exile and leading the very reduced forces of the International Left Opposition,

soon to be the Fourth International, was unambiguous about his position on the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy and that of China by Japan. “Of course we are for the defeat of Italy and the victory of Ethiopia, and therefore we must do every thing possible to hinder, by all available means, support to Italian imperialism, and at the same time facilitate the delivery of armaments to Ethiopia as best we can. However, we want to stress the point that this fight is not against fascism but against imperialism. When war is involved, for us it is not a question of who is ‘better’, the Negus (Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian emperor) or Mussolini: rather it is a question of the relationship of classes and the fight of an underdeveloped nation for independence against imperialism.”

A decade later, the Revolutionary Workers Party, the Canadian Trotskyist organization founded after the Second World War, devoted much of its paper to the struggle of the Indonesian people against Dutch and British imperialism. In the November 1945 issue of *Labour Challenge* we can read news of strikes in solidarity with the Indonesian freedom fighters and a call for “class conscious workers in the capitalist countries to demand (1) acts of international solidarity with the Indonesian people demanding the withdrawal of all imperialist troops and freedom for the colonial peoples; and (2) defence of the liberationist struggle against the slanderous attacks of the imperialists.

The author of the article was under no illusions about the nature of what they were supporting — “the Indonesian nationalist movement is still a bourgeois movement and its leaders cannot be expected to pursue other than bourgeois nationalist aims...” Nevertheless, just as in China where revolutionary Marxists gave support to the war against Japan, even under Chiang Kai Shek's leadership, so in Indonesia they supported the nationalist struggle.

There are many, many other examples of the principled position, supporting a wide variety of forces fighting against imperialist intervention and occupation. Socialists today would benefit from reading the documents of the postwar period, when the colonial revolution went into full speed from Vietnam to Palestine. In the latter case, our Canadian forbearers acquitted themselves well, as did the Trotskyists of the Revolutionary League of Palestine, who opposed the partition voted by the United Nations and called on the “workers of the two peoples to unite in a common front against imperialism and its agents”, by whom they meant both the Zionist and Arab League leaderships.

From Vietnam to Angola, Nicaragua to East Timor, we have seen an array of forces fight with arms in their hands to defeat imperialist armies or their surrogates, throw them out of their countries and depose regimes they had installed. Some of these forces were not as “bad” as Haile Selassie or Chiang Kai Shek or Sukarno in Indonesia, some were as bad or worse. What distinguished them was their determination to mobilize the masses to fight against imperialism. In these confrontations, our predecessors and we were not neutral bystanders. We wanted them to win. During the French war in Algeria, French and Belgian members of the Fourth International ran an arms factory for the National Liberation Front. In other instances, we sent other forms of help, material and political.

Now we see daily news footage of the crimes of imperialism in Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan. We see a resistance made up of forces, with most of which we have little in common with. On a tactical, strategic and philosophical level, we do not share the views of Hezbollah, the Pashtun nationalists of Afghanistan, let alone the neo-Taliban or regional drug wholesalers, or the Sunni or Baathist nationalists of Iraq. We are against attacks launched against civilians, whoever they might be. We are against indiscriminate killings and recoil in horror at the use of torture. We do not believe in religion as the solution to human misery. We believe in the creation of a mass socialist movement of the oppressed to throw off all their



Hezbollah youth.

oppressors, foreign and domestic. However, we can not wait until that movement exists, sitting on the sidelines, above the fray. We cannot equate the two sides in these conflicts and say that neither merit our support.

WHICH SIDE ARE WE ON?

We are on the side of those who struggle to drive imperialism from their countries by any and all means, be they elections, demonstrations or armed struggle. In a statement issued in July, the comrades of the Revolutionary Communist Group of Lebanon, supporters of the Fourth International, stated that the “latest operation, during which the fighters of Hezbollah succeeded in kidnapping two Israeli soldiers, ...represents, in fact, (almost) the only shining solidarity movement with the struggle of the Palestinian people and the easing of its pains and miseries.” The victory of Hezbollah and the Lebanese national resistance — for it is broader than Hezbollah alone — is a victory for us as anti-imperialists and socialists, whatever Hezbollah’s program is. The defeat of American imperialism and its “coalition of the willing” in Iraq is a blow against imperialism everywhere, no matter who is responsible for striking that blow. The resistance against the Afghan puppet regime of Karsai and the rising armed resistance to the NATO forces that prop

it up is something we welcome. They are fighting against imperialism and its campaign of foreign adventures and a defeat for imperialism is a victory for all of humanity, no matter who inflicts that defeat.

Trotsky’s words from 1935 — “when war is involved, for us it is not a question of who is ‘better’...for us it is a question of the relationship of classes and the fight of an underdeveloped nation for independence against imperialism” — resonate well today. We saw the victory of imperialism and its armies in Grenada, Panama and Yugoslavia and the appetite grew with the eating. Now we are witnessing forces that are mobilizing the oppressed classes and resisting successfully. We should support that resistance. The best way to do that, given our location and modest forces, is the broadest campaign for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and Iraq and for the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon and an end to the occupation of Palestine.

However, we must also think about how to express ideas that go beyond the solidarity movement, that articulate our revolutionary continuity with the socialist tradition of support for forces that mobilize the masses against imperialism and its allies. This is not easy or simple but we must be able to answer the question — which side are we on? ★

Lean on me?

The falling rate of friendship

BY ALAN SEARS

It seems that we all have fewer people to lean on these days. The rate of friendship is falling in the lean world of 21st century capitalism. In very real ways, capitalist restructuring is isolating us from one another and creating a situation in which we all have less time to reach out to friends through the ups and downs of our lives.

The falling rate of friendship in the United States is investigated in a recent article by sociologists Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin and Matthew E. Brashears. Since 1985, the friendship circles of people in the United States have grown much smaller. The average respondent to the General Social Survey shared confidences with about three people in 1985, while the current (2004) figure was closer to zero. The decline in sharing confidences outside of established couple and family relationships has been particularly dramatic.

We all need someone to lean on, now more than ever, as we face increasing precariousness in a society where job security is disappearing, the so-called 'war on terror' is generating fear and targeting people who already face serious discrimination and social services are cut to the bone. It seems, however, that we are actually leaning on each other less.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND FRIENDSHIP

The period in which these three sociologists note a drop in the size of friendship circles has been marked by a massive project of capitalist restructuring at the level of the corporation, the state and the global system. This restructuring, often identified in terms of lean production,

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True friends: Ernie
and Bert have
time to nurture
their friendship,
but increasingly
the rest of us
do not.



has squeezed friendship out of our daily lives.

One of the key dimensions of this squeeze on friendship is the time crunch that many face in today's society. People who are employed are working longer hours and many are juggling combinations of part-time work that make for unpredictable and erratic schedules. Further, the unpaid work in the household done mainly by women is being increased tremendously by cuts to health and social services. These cuts download the responsibility for caring for people with needs onto the home, for example by booting people out of the hospital more quickly, often in highly dependent situations.

Friendship thrives in unstructured time. Student life is a time when many people establish key friendships, based on having a lot of people around and some time to hang out. Of course, the unstructured time is being squeezed out as more

students have to work longer hours in part-time jobs to make ends meet.

In fact, the lean ethos of contemporary capitalism frowns on hanging out. Even at the level of childhood, play time is being squeezed out by increased pressure to perform on standardized tests and driving longer distances to more structured activities. At work, intensification of our jobs means less time to be even marginally pleasant to one another. Further, the atmosphere of insecurity is being used by employers to ramp up a sense of competition and individualism. Cuts in benefits and pensions and a shift to personal responsibility undercut the sense of a shared future that can contribute to solidarity.

Friendship is also undercut by the increase in poverty and homelessness created by cuts to social services and the elimination of programs to construct new affordable housing. People do establish important bonds in all kinds of difficult

situations, but it can be very hard to maintain those connections when pushed into constant insecurity and flux. The sheer pressure of keeping life going under these circumstances often takes a huge toll on personal relationships.

COMMODYING OUR INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS

Finally, capitalist restructuring has driven commodification much deeper into our daily lives. We have less and less access to public space, free time and non-market goods as these are cut or eliminated, forcing us to rely on buying and selling to meet our wants and needs. For most of us, selling means primarily peddling our capacity to work to employers, while buying means paying for all kinds of good and services regardless of our income, from food to housing to paying tuition fees for a post-secondary education.

Friendship has not been particularly susceptible to commodification, in contrast to many other areas of interpersonal connection. Sexual and dating relationships are marked by a feast of goods and services, ranging from the fashion

industry to text messaging to fitness products. Marriages are recognized through expensive and commodity-laden wedding festivities as well as anniversary gifts, flowers or exotic underwear to show you still have it. Child-parent relationships are heavily commodified, from the gluttony of the Christmas gift fest to back-to-school shopping. Indeed, there may be a connection between over-worked parents being deprived of the time and energy to spend with their children and the substitution of commodities for real shared experience.

Friendship is not particularly

*Capitalist restructuring is isolating us
from one another and creating a
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commodified and thus has a relatively low profile in popular culture. The TV series *Friends*, for example, was really about sex and dating rather than the ups and downs of friendships over time. All in all, friendship lacks the mystique of more intensely commodified relationships, which seem to acquire allure from their connection with market exchange.

Marx's idea of commodity fetishism was that we attribute human powers to things exchanged on the market and see the actual realm of human existence as dull and thing-like. The seemingly impersonal move of stock prices up or down, for example, seems to have an impact on the lives of millions. It actually feels like the goods and services are working it out between themselves and then making us live according to their rules. The macaroni and cheese box says, "I don't care how hungry you or your children are, I am only available for my price." The very real social relations that underpin these transactions are invisible to us - what we see is powerful goods and services and apparently powerless people peddling their asses in crap jobs to meet the demands of a bunch of things.

The allure of the commodity is there in the grand mythology of the perfect wedding day (existing primarily for the photos of the outfits), just as it is there in the idea that you'll get laid if you have the right car, or that you should smother your kids in gifts on their birthday even if it drives you deeper into debt. Friendship, it seems, doesn't have price in the same way, and therefore tends to seem less important and to disappear from view. The rate of friendship is therefore in decline in lean times when we all need to count on someone. ★



They are still our best friends, but is it enough?

Challenging masculinity

BY GREG SHARZER

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A man? For the Left, this often seems easy: traditional forms of masculinity are about aggressive, competitive behaviour. In this form, it is also about men abusing women and each other. “Being a man” is toxic—to men, those around them and the broader world.

That may all be true, but it leaves a lot of questions unanswered. How does masculinity affect men on a personal level? Where does it come from? And what can we do about it, both on the Left and in society at large?

MASCULINITY IN THE MIND

Masculinity is typically based on self-denial. For a man, ideas and rituals are to act as substitutes for emotional engagement with himself and those around him. Think of male values: honour, bravery, asceticism, competition, instrumentalism. In this version of masculinity, men are encouraged to want power and money. Everything is to be a performance whereby men meet others’ expectations, not their own needs. At work, a man is expected to make decisions that put him and his company ahead of everyone else. Men are expected to be sexual dynamos, whose desire for physical gratification is constructed as a natural and constant drive.

But a man is, unfortunately, human. In reaching towards these goals, he denies himself. Feelings and emotional needs aren’t supposed to exist—in fact these are dangerous, because they might reduce his effectiveness as a man. This leads to a casual ignorance of women, other men, and himself. This ignorance is twisted round to mean freedom from others as well as a hyper-individualism. A man not only doesn’t communicate his feelings, he doesn’t give a damn what other people

think of him, because other people don’t exist, except as objects to be used or overcome.

This is the ideal—men never reach it. Messy things like feelings and social connectedness interfere. What I want to argue is that traditional forms of masculinity are inherent to sexist capitalism and, contrary to the idea that feminism is “a woman thing,” feminism—and by extension challenging masculinity—can contribute to men’s own emancipation.

MASCULINITY IN THE WORLD

This profile of a man is completely external: his needs are defined by his circumstances. What are those circumstances? War and the workplace are useful analogies: neither allow real self-expression. Empathy, fear, playfulness are all banished to the after-work world. Think about the adjectives used to describe work: dog-eat-dog, get-ahead, kill-or-be-killed. Military training is all about breaking down the personality and rebuilding it as part of a collective in which individuals are not only subsumed but obliterated, to be replaced by a masculine ethos.

Masculinity as independence, “being your own man,” is a lie. It’s used most often when men are the most dependent. The sergeant, foreman or manager is happy to employ tough guys, with no internal guide of feelings or compassion for the outside world. That gives the boss a free hand to impose whatever order he likes.

But masculinity is not just false consciousness. There’s something real at its heart: the very repression it feeds on. Men’s emotions are present whether men recognize it or not. Psychiatry grew up with capitalism precisely because capitalist production suppressed feeling, separated the mind and the body, and commodified the products of both. Now we needed a science to extract what was dangerous to discipline.

Masculinity represents a substitute—

one that suggests the psychically destructive process of wage-labour (not to mention military discipline) is a form of freedom, allowing our supposedly innate and aggressive individualism to shine forth. At this point, capitalism doesn’t have to be an imposition: it’s simply the means to put men’s aggressive rationality to profitable ends.

Except, of course, that aggressive rationality is empty: the masculine ethos is never realized. This is a tremendous source of frustration for men, who have no access to their feelings, having been socialized to believe that feeling anything is dangerous and unmanly. They repeat the ritual of masculinity, getting progressively more frustrated that their unspoken desires aren’t met.

Luckily, whoever designed masculinity realized it wouldn’t work without a safety valve. Men are allowed to be angry, which is conveniently siphoned off into sports, barfights and woman abuse, or is put to good use in war.

That anger is terrifying for its targets: women, children, other men. But it can’t be understood as simply wrong or false. It has real roots as a compulsion to repeat the rituals of masculinity. The rituals don’t work, but that’s all men have been offered as a means to relate to women: flatter, use and/or abuse them. Take care of women—or demand to be taken care of by women.

This instrumentalism is exactly how we treat items for sale, or commodities. We fetishize them, seeing them as things rather than a relation between people (See *Lean on Me?*, p.36 for further discussion and definition of the notions of fetishism and commodity fetishism). Marx argued this went far beyond an attitude, and was structured into our very existence under capitalism.

In the same way, men fetishize women, as objects to attain some relief from the feelings inside they’re not allowed to express, let alone understand. Men don’t

Greg Sharzer thinks critically about masculinity while sipping single malt scotch and playing billiards at the lodge.



SPIDERMAN NO. 1, MAR. 1 1963, STAN LEE

realize that, having started from commodity fetishism, they will end up fetishizing. A respectful relationship with a woman—let alone themselves—is very hard. Approaching someone instrumentally means denying your own needs from the outset.

WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS

Feminism is often taken as man-bashing, which is ironic given its potential to help men. Feminism can be a way for men to understand themselves and build new relationships. For this, liberal feminism—equal rights, women in the boardroom, etc.—is useless. It starts by separating men and women, and promoting formal (not substantive) equality between them. Empowering women within capitalism may be a first step, but it's also fundamentally flawed: it justifies the system that damages all women and men. Feminism, in its radical and socialist forms, however, is a way to understand how oppression affects one's consciousness.

During the rise of feminism, men were encouraged to think critically about masculinity, particularly in the early 20th century socialist movement. Women were no longer property, but humans. This led to a redefinition of men as humans too, not as flesh-property owners. In the 1970s, feminist consciousness-raising sparked a men's movement which tried to understand masculinity as a product of capitalism and patriarchy. That movement led to interesting scholarship on the nature of the family and male breadwin-

ners. It also addressed the sexism rampant in the New Left. When the New Right backlash against feminism arose, the "sensitive" man was ridiculed as, well, unmanly.

It's no coincidence that the men's movement declined with the feminist movement. While feminism maintains a healthy radical streak in Canada today, like many social movements it has faced co-optation by liberals, with its radical voices marginalized to campuses and non-profits organizations.

With that decline, men who wish to engage critically with masculinity have few choices. There are still a few who pursue the guilty white liberal (GWL) track, suppressing their own thoughts and opinions because women have been historically oppressed. For GWLs, feminism is still something for women, to be respected and possibly feared, but not a tool for their own liberation. Well-meaning initiatives have come out of this, like the White Ribbon campaign. They're good first steps, but they're limited to seeing individual men as the problem, and a moral choice to treat women as equals as the solution.

This idea has some appeal, because it says all individual men have to do is change how they act. But it's not enough. Capitalism is a violently totalizing system that works beyond the level of any person. There's a desperate need to understand how the material processes of capital accumulation—and the brutal dispossession that accompanies it—affect men's consciousness. Men's liberation,

like women's, is not possible without a revolution against capitalism itself.

GUYS FIRST, MARXISTS SECOND

How do we work towards that revolution? It's worth starting with a caution: socialism and feminism haven't always meshed well. Many New Left women were marginalized, belittled and ridiculed. Yet they were still trying to work within Marxism. Some Marxist men bemoan the separatism of feminists. But many women tried to be a part of the Marxist movement. Their male comrades turned them off.

This isn't to knock the contributions of feminists as feminists, who have built strong, grassroots social movements like the abortion rights and anti woman-abuse struggles. But the road could have been a lot smoother. Marxism could have started a dialogue with feminism, rather than a pissing contest. Its failure shows how deeply the emotional repercussions of sexism—the "psychological wage"—is ingrained in men. Yet that wage is a consequence of a greater alienation that psychologist Michael Lerner calls "surplus powerlessness". The alienation that we experience at work and in society at large gets refracted into despair about changing our circumstances. Lerner describes how the New Leftists of the 1960s refused to challenge their own sexism and racism because they didn't trust anyone to listen to them.

Leftists have to work together. Sexism can't be addressed until men start recognizing its structural impact and the effects of surplus powerlessness on their own consciousness. But the left also has to speak to men at large who may not share our understanding of masculinity. For that, we need to raise transitional demands that help men move towards a feminist politic. In *Revisioning Men's Lives: Gender, Intimacy and Power*, psychiatrist Terry A. Kupers speaks about organizing men into the National Organization for Men Against Sexism.

"Men cannot be politicized by condemning all that it has meant to them to be a man ... Men who feel some degree of dissatisfaction with the "real man" role and feel slightly inadequate, but refuse to compensate by resorting to sexism—just the men a political men's movement

SEE MASCULINITY: PAGE 41

BOOK REVIEW

The Wal-Mart monopoly

WAL-MART: THE FACE OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CAPITALISM.
EDITED BY NELSON LICHTENSTEIN. NEW YORK: NEW PRESS, 2006.

REVIEWED BY BRE WALT

Contributing authors in this book of critical essays paint a damning portrait of the world's largest corporation. The book details the technological precision of the company and how this leads to unequal power within the retail market and supply chains. Among other things, the book details the vast amount of data collected and retained by Wal-Mart and the ways in which the company opposes and quashes union activity, women's equality in the workplace and workers' rights worldwide.

The company, whose head office is in Bentonville, Arkansas, is the world's largest corporation. In 2004, seven cents of every dollar spent in a US store was spent at Wal-Mart. With sales of over \$300 billion per year (likely to top \$1 trillion per year within a decade), and more than 5000 megastores worldwide, the heirs of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton (who died in 1992) own 39 percent of the company. This makes them twice as wealthy as the family of Bill Gates. Wal-Mart's profits rose from \$33 billion a year in 1991 to \$191 billion in 2001. The corporation is also the largest US employer, despite its poverty-level wages.

Wal-Mart shuffles tens of thousands of products around the world daily to meet demand in its 3,600 domestic and 1,600 international stores. Although this colossal demand for products creates new opportunities for suppliers, it also allows Wal-Mart to pressure smaller companies to continuously adapt and restructure their business models around Wal-Mart's strict demands.

Wal-Mart is arguably the world's largest



marketing channel for consumer products, bringing in about 20 million customers per day to its retail stores. This consumer volume creates such exposure for products that many companies, once involved, become dependant upon Wal-Mart for their continued prosperity. One of Wal-Mart's principles, well known to suppliers, is called "plus one". It means that every year the price must be lowered or the quality improved for each of the hundreds of thousands of products the company handles. The competition is so fierce that more than 500 large vendors have established permanent sales offices near Wal-Mart's Bentonville headquarters, and tens of thousands of global suppliers attend its global purchasing fairs.

In order to maintain a monopoly on the retail market, Wal-Mart uses some of the most advanced technology to control almost everything in each individual store from corporate headquarters. From this office, every Wal-Mart store in the world has its temperature controlled and its data warehoused. The information stored in

this facility contains detailed internal operational data, serving as the backbone for the retail link, and is by far the largest private collection of data in the world, second only to the Pentagon. It collects and organizes data from 140,000 point-of-sale systems around the world and records over 20 million customer transactions per day. Containing about 500 terabytes of information, this data warehouse, according to the new film *Wal-Town*, is twice as large as the amount of accessible information available on the world wide web. By collecting such vast amounts of consumer information, Wal-Mart is able to deliver precise quantities of product at the right time. The delivery time to Wal-Mart's distribution center is generally around fifteen minutes. They know what consumers want, what price they are willing to pay, and how to get the product to them in time.

Wal-Mart has perfected the art of lowering prices while increasing profits, and it comes at the cost of substandard labour conditions for its 1.5 million "associates." For instance, twenty-eight hours per week is considered full-time employment. There is a scheduling program run off a Bentonville computer that schedules all Wal-Mart employees based on typical store and consumer trends. This leads to some employees being overworked, since someone has to cover areas where not enough staff are scheduled. Work schedules change frequently, making everyday life difficult for those at the bottom and leading many to simply quit.

Turnover at Wal-Mart is 35 percent per year for full-time employees and 56 percent for part-timers. These high turnover rates lead to inadequate training—mostly done on a computer—and managers being short-handed for staff. Mary Roland, an assistant manager, is fed up and says: "At Wal-Mart, you are expected to do the work of three people." After 10 p.m., workers are locked in the store and cannot leave—even for emergencies like a sick child. According to

Bre Walt is a freelance writer and an honours English student at the University of Guelph. She is an executive member of the student union there and founder of the group, Students Against Corporate Control, which fights for social justice and environmental issues. She is currently writing her thesis on the privatization of post-secondary education.

Women working at Wal-Mart are paid less than men in every region.

Wal-Mart worker Katie Mitchell, “after you kicked and screamed the supervisor might let you out the back door, which was far from the parking lot where employee’s cars were parked and was unlighted.”

To keep their jobs, managers do what they are told by executives in Bentonville. Jed Stone worked at Wal-Mart as a store manager from 1983-1991 while Sam Walton was still the CEO. Stone says that Wal-Mart is different from anywhere else he has worked in that executives continually warn managers that if they do not increase sales and reduce costs someone else “could have your job at any moment.” Stone also says that in order to keep the shelves stocked and the floors shiny, he had to break rules by having employees work off the clock to avoid paying overtime.

Laverne Coates worked at a Wal-Mart in Ohio for several years. After attempting to take time off to tend to her dying sister, she was told by her supervisor that her “sister would die without her just as well.” Coates was also penalized for showing an interest in joining a union and for calling in sick to work one day. She later discovered that she had nine warning pink slips in her file that she did not know about, resulting in her firing.

The management teams have a meeting each Friday in a large amphitheatre where they watch a broadcast of the CEO and VPs talking directly to the audience about the week’s successes and problems. A manager whose store has sent in a payroll with overtime, which is against company policy, is named and shamed in front of the entire audience.

Wage abuse lawsuits against Wal-Mart are common, with 38 as of 2004. Furthermore, Wal-Mart is named in the largest civil rights class-action suit in US history (*Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*), which charges the company with discriminating against women in promotions, pay and job assignments.

Lead plaintiff Betty Dukes worked at Wal-Mart for nearly nine years yet was making less than \$8.50 per hour. As late

as 2003, a year and a half after the suit was filed, data produced by Wal-Mart showed that men hired within the last few years in the same job as Dukes were making more per hour. Ramona Scott, who worked at Wal-Mart for several years and had access to payroll records, noticed that men generally made more than women who had as much or more seniority. The male store manager that she asked about this said, “Men are here to make a career and women aren’t. Retail is for housewives who just need to earn extra money.” This store manager’s successor later told Scott that if she wanted to get along with him, “she would have to behave like his wife.”

With store managers setting wages and no system in place for promotions, a federal judge working on the suit explains that, “Women working at Wal-Mart are paid less than men in every region, pay disparities exist in most job categories, the salary gap widens over time even for men and women hired into the same jobs at the same time, women take longer to enter into management positions and the higher one looks in the organization, the lower the percentage of women.” While the vast majority of Wal-Mart managers are drawn from the ranks of hourly employees, and women make up over two-thirds of those hourly ranks, women receive only one-third of all promotions to management positions.

Despite the incredible boom this company has seen over the last decade, there will be an eventual decline of the current form of warehouse-sized retail outlets. Companies like Wal-Mart that depend on customers driving to their retail locations, and that source the vast majority of their products from half way around the planet, will be forced to change drastically in the coming decades if they want to survive. The decline in global petroleum reserves and the passing of the global peak for oil production will force economies to become increasingly local in almost every aspect of their operations. The reliance of these companies on cheap, fast and long-range shipment of goods is so paramount to their survival that without them, “business as usual” is an oxymoron. My only criticism of this book is that the authors and editor of this book omitted this one crucial aspect of the essence of Wal-Mart. ★

Masculinity

Continued from page 39

wants to attract—do not want to hear about refusing to be a man. They want reasons to feel good about who they are.”

This doesn’t mean giving up our critique of masculinity as oppressive, but reframing it—all the while acknowledging the different ways that women and men are oppressed and having our analysis and practice reflect this. “It is not a matter of who suffers more, rather it is about how gender relations based on domination are not good for anyone” To create more anti-sexist men, the left has to move its analysis from an individual to a social level, engaging men to change material forms of sexism. This could include:

A. Working to defend the gains of the feminist movement including keeping abortion safe and legal, funding women’s healthcare and systemic support for women facing abuse. All of those measures mean a better-funded, more democratic welfare state, which benefits men and women.

B. Reforming the critical men’s movement, researching masculinity, showing how male violence is rooted in social oppression, linking changes in the structures of capitalist society to male privilege. For example, what does the rise of the service industry and the decline of manufacturing mean for North American versions of masculinity? What about homelessness and long-term unemployment?

C. Fighting for a broader social transformation. This is not a moral commitment to change by individual men, that inevitably fails when faced with the brutal, totalizing pressures of capitalist society, but a commitment to a political project of feminist organizing for socialism.

There are many other issues to address e.g. racism and immigration and their impact on men’s self-concept, the role homophobia plays in cementing masculinity, the question of patriarchy, and so on. Negotiating the personal and political is never easy, but linking men to real, ongoing feminist struggles is a way to approach the problem, and start men on the long process of fighting to overcome both masculinity and capitalism. ★

Lebanon

Continued from page 33

As it turns out, the carnage in Lebanon seems more likely to destroy military and political careers in Israel than to bolster them.

The warmongering neoconservative columnist Charles Krauthammer, a leading advocate of the view that “the West is in a war with fundamentalist Islam that will last for our lifetimes,” warned that an Israeli failure to crush Hezbollah will cause American policymakers to question its usefulness as a strategic ally.

Ironically, an editorial in the *Forward*, an influential Jewish weekly which generally reflects the views of the hard-line Zionist lobby, denounced Bush administration neo-cons for pushing Israel into war for American interests.

There is another force that would prefer the slaughter in Lebanon to go on and on. That’s al-Qaeda, the global totalitarian-religious jihadist movement that loathes, as its main rivals, Shiite Muslims and successful nationalist resistance forces – exactly the two things that Hezbollah represents. Al-Qaeda needs to recruit to its brand of terrorist jihad from the rubble of defeat; it cannot recruit people from a country where a movement like Hezbollah succeeds.

This is not to imply that Hezbollah is left-wing; indeed its political success began with the defeat and decline of the Lebanese secular left. The point, however, is that, like Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah wages a national struggle that gives fanatical terrorism of the Osama bin Laden type no room to operate. To a remarkable degree, Hezbollah has reached out beyond Lebanon’s traditional sectarian-communal politics and become a national resistance force in the eyes not only of Shia Muslims, but also Sunnis and even part of the Christian Lebanese community.

AND THE WINNER IS...?

Amidst this horror, no one can say that the Lebanese people have “won.” To repair even the physical wreckage of the country may take as long as in Iraq, and that is the smallest part of the unimaginable damage to the psychology of the population, the political structures and

the hope that had just been reborn in recent years.

The people of Israel have lost a great deal too and the choice they face now is clear, but the short-term prospects for that choice are not encouraging. The choice is whether to make peace with the Arab world and the Palestinian people, by a clean and complete break with the policies of Occupation and the delusion of security through overwhelming firepower; or to carry through the Zionist program of crushing the Palestinian nation by annexation and the “unilateral” creation of bantustans, and adopting a perspective of permanent war-and-threat-of-war against the rest of the Middle East.

The war was popular in Israel, both because of the trauma of real rockets falling in northern Israel and the myth that “victory” was possible with the use of sufficient force. Meanwhile, the Israeli military killed more Palestinian civilians in Gaza (over 200) than all Israeli deaths, civilian and military, in Lebanon. But hopeful signs began to emerge as the myth dissipated: antiwar demonstrations that began with a few hundred hardcore activists grew to rallies of five thousand Israeli citizens, Jewish and Arab together demanding peace.

Some Israeli pilots, aware that their orders to bomb civilian houses were a crime against humanity, deliberately missed the targets. A few soldiers and reservists publicly refused to serve and faced prosecution, while a much larger number of reservists simply didn’t show up and were ignored by the military which can’t afford to arrest them all.

The American people are certainly losers: along with the war in Iraq, this disaster has made us poorer and less free at home, and more despised and hated around the world. Everyone understands the meaning of the rapid US re-supply of 5000-pound bombs to the Israeli air force, and the expedited shipment of cluster bombs — with the meaningless exhortation for Israel to be “careful” in using them!

The political winner in this war is Hezbollah. Far from turning against it, most of the Lebanese population – and not only the Shia community – sees in it the standard-bearer for national resistance and dignity. This will be further enhanced by its role in rebuilding villages from the

rubble of Israeli bombs.

But the biggest question left hanging after this bloody war is the status of the looming confrontation with Iran. If logic were to prevail, the backfire of the U.S. proxy war with Iran, waged in Lebanon by the Israeli military to show the world that the United States rules the Middle East, should have proven the reverse. US power can incinerate a country, a region or the world, but Iran has the capacity to resist, not only on its own but through its allies and clients.

Arab governments that calculated the US-Israeli onslaught would wipe out an Iranian-allied movement and isolate the Tehran regime will think harder before they sign on to the next imperial venture. And European states, which stand to be devastated by an oil price shock and the terrorism that an uncontrollable Middle East conflagration could produce, should be applying the brakes – hard.

But there is an alternative logic, especially for a US administration whose leading “thinkers” inhabit a reality-free zone of their own creation. If the conquest of Iraq is a disastrous failure, they argue, it can be “solved” by taking on Syria and Iran too. One power-drunk calculation might be that Iran’s “deterrent asset” in Lebanon, Hezbollah, can no longer militarily attack Israel and that Iran is now ripe for the taking. If these ideologically-driven strategists, most of whom have no actual military experience, really believe they “won” in Lebanon and what’s needed is only the “will” to proceed to the next regime change, the potential danger to the world is unimaginable.

Make no mistake: The course that US imperialism has set toward confrontation and global catastrophe cannot be stopped by international resistance alone. It requires also an antiwar movement at home, independent of the twin US war parties, that can organize the deep loathing of the American people for the dreadful consequences of a war that is now spreading outward from Iraq, to Lebanon and beyond. For Canadian activists, demanding an end to the Canadian military contribution to NATO’s expedition in Afghanistan must be viewed as more than a narrow national issue, but an important part of an international antiwar strategy. ★

TIME TO ORGANIZE

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