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Socialist Voice #72, December 3, 2005

**Canada's War Profits: Building a Relevant Anti-War Movement North of 49**

**by Derrick O'Keefe**

*This article originally appeared in Seven Oaks Magazine*

The Canadian Peace Alliance recently held its 20th anniversary conference in Ottawa, November 11-13, gathering close to 200 anti-war activists from across the country. Convened under the slogan of 'Challenging Canada's Role in Empire', participants came out of the weekend resolving to make March 18, 2006 – the 3rd anniversary of the illegal invasion of Iraq – the largest day of protest against the occupation since the massive pre-war rallies of 2002-2003.

Peace and justice coalitions and organizations in Canada are also gearing up to campaign against war and occupation during the federal election. Foreign policy issues that need to be highlighted – and that have yet to be consistently raised by the federal New Democrats (NDP) or any other major party – include Canada's stepped-up role in the occupation of Afghanistan, the overthrow of democracy in Haiti, and the Liberal government's refusal to come out in support of U.S. war resisters' right to stay in Canada.

So as we set out on the anti-war campaign trail, towards both mass rallies on March 18 and the goal of having a meaningful impact on the discourse surrounding the election, it is useful to consider the obstacles in our path.

The first, already alluded to, is that the NDP – unlike in the period before the launching of the Iraq war – has failed to aggressively raise any of the key issues, with the possible exception of the war resisters. Jack Layton's refusal to condemn General Rick Hillier's bellicose and racist remarks regarding the Afghanistan war in July 2005 was an ominous signal; the NDP's silence on Haiti, with some important exceptions, has also hurt efforts to disseminate the truth about Canada's role in throwing out a democratically elected president in the hemisphere's poorest country. The sheer scale of the human rights disaster in Haiti, and the growing exposure of Canada's role, may just compel the NDP and Layton to make this a campaign issue.

There are, though, larger and more deeply rooted causes behind the lack of awareness of Canadian complicity in policies of war and Empire. The generalized corporate media blackout,

of course, almost goes without saying, but it has been particularly galling with respect to the lack of substantive coverage on Haiti.

The single biggest impediment to getting people mobilized around war and occupation issues is the widespread perception that Canada's hands are clean in the world; that unseemly regime changes are things carried out by George W. Bush and that at worst we are benevolent bystanders or well-meaning peacekeepers coming in after the fact.

Perhaps one under-utilized way to get around this pervasive myth is to highlight the blatant war profiteering of massive Canadian corporations. While the sordid operations of the likes of Exxon and Halliburton are internationally known, equally rapacious war companies based north of the 49th parallel are getting away with scant attention. The two that stand out are Gildan Activewear and SNC-Lavalin.

For commuters in the Vancouver area, in particular, these two mega-corporations are becoming downright ubiquitous. SNC-Lavalin has been awarded the contract for the largest P3 (public-private partnership) in British Columbia's history, the multi-billion dollar construction of a rapid transit line from downtown to the airport and the suburb of Richmond (the RAV-line). Meanwhile, SNC also partners with the public sector wherever the Canadian and American armies venture, holding a contract to supply the U.S. army with hundreds of millions of bullets each year, building the new Canadian Embassy in occupied Port-au-Prince, and receiving 'reconstruction' contracts in Palestine, Iraq and elsewhere.

Gildan Activewear is a massive garment manufacturer, controlling 40% of the North American t-shirt market. Following the coup against Aristide, and the de facto government's decision to overturn minimum wage increases brought in by the Lavalas Party government, Gildan announced that it would be moving some operations from Honduras to Haiti. The company is currently engaged in a massive publicity campaign, with ads on hundreds of bus shelters in Vancouver proclaiming the sweatshop label 'A part of your life'. It has been speculated that they are building their public profile with an eye to winning the Vancouver 2010 Olympics clothing contract. The cases of Gildan and SNC are not unique in terms of Canadian corporations, but only two of the most blatant examples that belie the quaint notion of a harmless, innocent big business community, and the related myth of a political policy pursuing lofty, disinterested 'humanitarian' objectives.

Nearly two years ago now, at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, acclaimed author and activist Arundhati Roy made a widely discussed call for the anti-war movement to take aim at the corporate backers of Empire:

"I suggest we choose by some means two of the major corporations that are profiting from the destruction of Iraq. We could then list every project they are involved in. We could locate their offices in every city and every country across the world. We could go after them. We could shut them down. It's a question of bringing our collective wisdom and experience of past struggles to bear on a single target. It's a question of the desire to win." (*The New American Century*, *The Nation*, February 9, 2004)

No such coordinated global campaign has really taken flight. This doesn't, however, diminish the importance of identifying and exposing the corporate machinations behind war.

Here in Canada, we should focus on explaining the very real business interests behind our government's foreign policy, beginning with the profits of Gildan and SNC-Lavalin. These corporations are indeed 'a part of our lives'. It's high time we made them, and their government allies, pay a political and financial price for the destruction they have wrought, from Iraq to Haiti and far beyond.

Today's system of empire is much more than the demonic image of Dick Cheney and his Halliburton gang. As we head into a federal election campaign, and build towards the March 18 rallies across Canada, we would do well to remember that there are more than enough warmongers with addresses much closer to home.

Socialist Voice #73, December 12, 2005

## **Election Challenge to the NDP: Take the Road of Struggle**

**By John Riddell and Roger Annis**

Buzz Hargrove, president of the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW), dealt the New Democratic Party a low blow at the outset of Canada's federal election campaign on December 2 when he announced his support for re-election of the Liberal Party of Prime Minister Paul Martin.

"We want a clear minority government, led by Paul Martin, with as many New Democrats holding the balance of power as possible," Hargrove said while introducing Martin to his union's national conference. The "extreme right-wing" Conservatives need to be kept from winning at all costs, he added.

Martin's minority government lost a parliamentary vote of confidence on November 29. The NDP teamed up with the pro-Quebec sovereignty Bloc Quebecois and the right-wing Conservative party to defeat the government. An election is set for January 23.

### **Lesser-evil politics**

Some union leaders argue that Martin represents a "lesser evil" compared to Conservative leader Stephen Harper. But this approach plays into the hands of Canada's ruling rich, who control *both* the Liberal and Conservative parties. Elections play a subordinate role in a political system dominated by big business, big media, the courts, and the high government bureaucracy.

Unless a mass movement intervenes, election results are shaped by the dominant social forces. Voters are encouraged to vote not for what they want, but for the lesser evil. When working people buy the lesser evil line, the capitalist power brokers always get their way, since the two dominant parties advocate close variants of the same policies.

### **Liberals offer nothing to labour**

To judge from the record of the "lesser evil" Liberals, this mechanism is clearly working well. Since the last election in June 2004, the Liberal government has done nothing to earn support from the working class movement. They showed their true colours in a pre-election gift to Canada's ruling rich: \$5.2 billion in corporate tax cuts, which boosted stock values by tens of billions overnight.

Although Martin professes concern for health care, he failed to counter the threat to public health insurance posed by this year's Supreme Court ruling authorizing private insurance plans (see Socialist Voice #44). Such are the Liberal attacks on health care that Stephen Harper, whose party is the most outspoken advocate of privatizing health care services, is making headway in the election campaign by masquerading as a defender of public health care.

Canada is enjoying what passes under capitalism for buoyant economic conditions: industrial production is up, official unemployment statistics are edging downward, the currency has soared, and the government is awash in budgetary surpluses. Yet the capitalist war against working

people continues without let-up, and unions in particular are under sharp attack (see Socialist Voice #54). Martin is proposing modest increases in social spending, but these fail utterly to address the urgency and depth of poverty and economic insecurity in this country.

Flush with financial resources earned from cutting salaries and social services to workers, the government has set Canada on the road to war. Earlier this year, it voted a \$12.8 billion increase in military spending over five years. This will expand the army by 5,000 troops and 3,000 reservists. The NDP voted for the increase.

Thousands of Canadian soldiers have been shipped to Afghanistan, charged by army chief of staff R.J. Hillier to kill the “ball of snakes” represented by those who resist foreign occupation. Meanwhile, Canada has sent police and political advisers to back the murderous junta it helped install in Haiti (see Socialist Voice #49 and #50).

Some 40,000 people marched through the streets of Montreal on December 3 to demand radical improvements to protection of the environment, on the occasion of a major international conference on the environment. Yet the federal government has done little to implement even the weak and inadequate Kyoto accord. Greenhouse-gas emissions have been increasing faster in Canada than in most industrialized countries — almost twice as fast as in the U.S.

### **NDP leadership aspires to lesser-evil status**

The labour movement in Canada sought a way out of the two-party trap by *building its own party*. In 1961, it joined with others to found the New Democratic Party in the hope that the new party it would represent workers, farmers, oppressed layers, and movements for social change.

Yet, where the NDP is strong enough to elect provincial governments, it acts as a faithful defender of the capitalist order, effectively replacing one of the old-line parties in the role of lesser evil. All the provincial NDP parties aspire to this role. And the federal NDP, barred from hope of government by its hostility to Quebec’s national rights, projects no more ambitious a goal than to exert a helpful influence on a Liberal or Tory government.

Although NDP leader Jack Layton argues against Hargrove’s support for the Liberals, he proposes much the same formula: electing “as many New Democrats as possible.” It is the same goal as Hargrove: positioning the NDP to hold the balance of power in a parliament where no party has a majority.

Moreover, the federal NDP’s program, while advocating some useful measures, is shaped to enhance their parliamentary credibility, hewing close to the Liberal model. The party leadership opposes or at best abstains from the mass struggles that can in fact create conditions for meaningful social change. They are committed defenders of capitalist rule.

### **Balance-sheet of NDP-Liberal alliance**

The record of the NDP’s parliamentary alliance with the Liberals this year shows the bankruptcy of this course. The New Democrats backed the federal government budget earlier this year in return for a promise of \$4.6 billion in additional social spending and withdrawal of proposed tax cuts for corporations. In November, when the NDP joined in pushing through a non-confidence

motion against that same government, the Liberals had restored and augmented the corporate tax cuts, while the fate of the promised social spending, little of it yet delivered, was tossed in the lap of the next parliament.

In return, the NDP did more than approve a budget proposing massive increases to military spending. It lapsed into silence over the government's military interventions in Afghanistan and Haiti — actions that would have aroused strong opposition across the country if the NDP had spoken up. By falling in line with the Liberals' war program, the NDP did working people an injury that weighs much more heavily than the benefits of increased social spending.

### **Failure to defend Quebec rights**

During the NDP-Liberal alliance the inquiry by Justice John Gomery into Liberal government corruption and political payoffs in Quebec reached its culmination. These revelations brought to a head Quebecois' resentment of federal tutelage. Liberal party support in Quebec plummeted; support for sovereignty soared; and the Bloc Quebecois is poised to win almost every Quebec seat where francophones are in the majority.

Here was an historic opportunity for the NDP to speak out in defense of the right of the Quebecois to national self-determination and democratic government, rights denied by the Liberals' scandal-ridden attempts to bribe Quebecois into supporting federalism. The NDP could have blocked with the Bloc Quebecois in defense of Quebec and for the elementary reforms advocated by both parties. In doing so, the NDP would have taken a step toward an alliance with the Quebecois people against the Liberal-Tory federal regime to the benefit all working people in Canada.

Instead, during the entire "sponsorship" scandal, the NDP kept silent on Quebec rights. And during the election campaign, Jack Layton has come out squarely in support of the oppressive "Clarity Bill," the law that empowers the federal government to nullify the results of any future referendums on sovereignty in Quebec. (Pro-federalism forces won the last referendum, in 1995, by less than a one percent margin).

### **Crisis in auto industry**

The months of Liberal-NDP alliance also saw gathering clouds over Canada's unionized auto industry. The U.S.-based auto giants are embarked on a program of plant closures and new demands for wage and benefits takebacks. At a minimum, the autoworkers need effective government measures to protect their livelihood, health benefits, and pensions. The NDP's policy does none of this. Presenting his "auto strategy" in Oshawa on December 1, Jack Layton called for (1) more auto research and development; (2) "targeted incentives" (that is, subsidies) for auto plant retooling; (3) more vigorous trade policies against foreign competition; and (4) easier border crossings for auto transport trucks.

This is "lesser-evil" politics with a vengeance. The possibility of a fightback against the cuts is simply ignored. Each of the NDP's demands aims at government assistance — not for the auto workers — but for the giant auto corporations. This has increasingly been the approach of the

Canadian Auto Workers leadership, and it provides a rationale for their tilt toward political support of the Liberal government that holds the money bags.

**The NDP as labour's alternative**

The NDP's current program, put to test of government or governmental coalition, turns out to be not substantially different from old-line bourgeois parties. This program positions the NDP as nothing better than a lesser evil — a somewhat less cruel administrator of capitalist oppression. And the NDP as lesser evil is not worthy of support.

Nevertheless, socialists should give critical support to the NDP, and oppose the Liberal and Conservative parties. The NDP, despite its right-wing course, contains within it the germ of an alternative — the consciousness among hundreds of thousands of its supporters that working people need our own party and our own government, committed to defending them against corporate power. Major NDP gains in the federal election would be a step forward for the working class and a stimulus to workers' struggle.

We need a workers government in Ottawa, one pledged to champion the interests of the working class. The NDP and other working class organizations must break with the lesser-evil framework of politics in Canada and support the struggles of working people.

For union and political activists today, the way to push the whole movement along this path is to step up campaigns for solidarity with the people of Haiti, against factory closings and cuts to social services, or support of the self-determination struggles of indigenous peoples and the Quebecois. Far from relaxing these efforts in the name of playing the electoral game, we need to redouble them.

Socialist Voice #74, December 28, 2005

## **Cuban leaders hail Bolivian election victory**

**'With your victory, a new history is born'**

**By Ricardo Alarcon and Fidel Castro**

***Introduction:** The following message to Evo Morales appears on the Granma web site over the signatures of Ricardo Alarcón and Fidel. I was struck most by its evaluation of what December 18 represented historically: America — our America, as José Martí said — rising up and in so doing discovering its true face, its indigenous face, its Black face, its mestizo face. And then by the evaluation it projects of Evo Morales as a leader and combatant in the revolutionary struggle.*

*Without a doubt, the Cuban leadership, although they addressed this message to Evo Morales, and through him the Bolivian people, really had a different intended audience. The intended audience, I believe, is people like us — revolutionary and progressive forces of the entire world — to help us become conscious of the tremendous, historic significance of this moment, nothing less than “a new history.” And to help us have faith and trust in the leadership that the Bolivian people — and above all the indigenous peoples of Bolivia — have raised up at this moment in the person of compañero Evo Morales and the team around him.*

*You will find many nice-sounding diplomatic statements of congratulations from Cuba to dignitaries of various countries over the past decades, but you will not find many like this one. Fidel's statement upon arriving in Venezuela for Hugo Chavez's first inauguration did not even refer to Chávez personally, but said that he wanted to share this moment with the Bolivarian people of Venezuela, a moment, he said, that could mark a turning point like July 26, 1953, marked in Cuba, i.e., the beginning of a revolutionary struggle.*

*There were undoubtedly political and diplomatic considerations involved in Fidel's deliberate understatedness at that moment, as there are today in relation to the outspoken character of this statement. What needs to be kept in mind, I think, is not just that Cuba felt it could speak so freely today, but also that such seasoned revolutionaries as the Cuban leaders felt it necessary and useful to throw the full weight of their own prestige behind Evo Morales and his comrades, and not just the cause he represents, but his leadership personally.*

*That message is not for the people of Bolivia — not the working people, the indigenous people, the oppressed people, who backed Evo massively — but for **us**. My own surmise is that the Cuban leadership understands that a very sharp struggle may soon break out around Bolivia, and it is necessary to begin rallying the revolutionary and progressive forces into battle formation.*

*The original message is here: <http://granma.cu/espanol/2005/diciembre/vier23/mensaje.html>. This is my translation, having been unable to find the full text in English elsewhere. — Joaquín Bustelo*



**Message of the National Assembly of People's Power and of the Council of State of Cuba to Evo Morales**

Dear compañero Evo Morales:

We have received with profound joy the historic victory of the people of Bolivia in Sunday's election, and your proclamation, by a crushing and indisputable majority, as President of Bolivia.

For months we have followed with interest the news coming from your country and were aware of the tremendous obstacles that were being erected to frustrate the will of your people. We knew of the pressures of the empire, of the maneuvers and intrigues of those who would continue to strip Bolivia of its immense natural resources and who are the ones responsible for the tremendous misery, oppression and discrimination imposed for centuries on a noble and rebellious people that has never stopped fighting for freedom and justice.

Millions of Quechuas, Aymaras, Guaranies, Chiquitanos and other native peoples of your country had been always excluded from a political system that was the legacy and continuation of colonial servitude. Many of them were arbitrarily denied the right to vote on December 18, and in that way they snatched hundreds of thousands of votes from you.

But on that day, despite everything, the people won. The magnitude of their victory was so great and eloquent that all were forced to recognize it, even those who for years have slandered you, have distorted the aspirations and sacrifices of the social movements you have known how to lead with wisdom and dignity, and until the eve of the elections were determined to hide the tremendous support for your candidacy.

With your victory, a new history is born, the history of the emancipation of the peoples whom colonialism and racism wanted to crush and wipe out. Finally, after half a millennium of genocide, they come to power with you. It is the hour of the true discovery of America, of indigenous America, of Black America, of mestizo America, of the America of Bolívar and Martí, that today is everywhere proclaiming its definitive and unrenounceable independence.

You and your people have before you new and great challenges. It is necessary that you be accompanied, from right now, by the full solidarity of the entire world.

We send you the solidarity of the Government and People of Cuba. In greeting you and celebrating with you this victory that we feel as our own, we call on all peoples to reject imperialist threats and to unfold the most energetic and firm backing of the government you will lead with the determination and dignity that have characterized your life as a selfless fighter.

Thank you, Evo, thanks to the Bolivian people for having demonstrated with the clarity of the sun that another, better world is possible.

Receive the embrace of a Cuba that is always revolutionary and in solidarity.

**Ricardo Alarcón**, National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba

**Fidel Castro Ruz**, Council of State of the Republic of Cuba