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Socialist Voice #100, June 5, 2006

## **Anti-Jewish Prejudice Yesterday and Today**

**by Suzanne Weiss**

*Editors' note: "Anti-Semitism" is a much misused and much misunderstood concept. This epithet is often wrongly applied to opposition to the Israeli state's apartheid-like policies—such as the statement in defense of Palestinians adopted by the Canadian Union of Public Employees' Ontario convention in May. Yet anti-Jewish prejudice remains deeply rooted in capitalist society and continues to pose a deadly threat to all working people. Suzanne Weiss explained its origins and present character in a talk given to the Socialism 2006 conference, organized by Socialist Action in Toronto, on April 29, 2006. This article is based on that talk.*

In 1919, V.I. Lenin, the great leader of the Russian Revolution, gave a brief talk on anti-Semitism that was recorded for use among the Russian peasantry.

"Anti-Semitism means spreading enmity towards the Jews," he said. It is a "remnant of ancient feudal times, when the priests burned heretics at the stake, when the peasants live in slavery, and when the people were crushed and inarticulate." In our epoch, "we often see the capitalists

fomenting hatred against the Jews in order to blind the workers, to divert their attention from the real enemy of the working people, capitalism.” (*Collected Works*, vol. 29, page 252)

That sums up both how Jewish prejudice and hatred was born and the form it takes in modern capitalism. But as we shall see, the rise of Zionism has given this scourge a new twist.

### **The history of Anti-Semitism**

Historically, the Jewish people survived as social group with an economic function—that of merchants and traders in pre-capitalist societies. Even before the Roman Empire, only one-quarter of the world’s Jews lived in Palestine, while the rest formed commercial colonies across the ancient world from Iran to Egypt to Greece.

In pre-capitalist societies, this commercial role was viewed with disdain and prejudice. Typically, it was fulfilled by ethnic groups. Examples in recent times are the Lebanese and Indians in Africa, or the Chinese in much of south-east Asia. The Jews occupied this economic role for a long time in Europe and the Mediterranean.

When the Roman Empire fell, the Jewish merchant class continued to play an indispensable role in feudal, non-commercial economy. As Abram Leon explains in his classic study, *The Jewish Question*, Jewish people who were not in the merchant class were assimilated. This period was free of systematic anti-Semitism; it lasted in Western Europe until about 1100.

### **First rise of Anti-Semitism**

After about 1100, a native bourgeoisie grew up among western European peoples. These new bourgeois affirmed themselves as people of commerce and shoved the Jews aside.

Anti-Semitism was the ideological weapon used by the clerics and new bourgeois to expel the Jews. Persecution from rising bourgeois in Spain and western Europe forced Jews to escape to the more primitive, pre-capitalist territories of the Turkish empire and eastern Europe, especially Poland, where they continued their role as traders. This period lasted until about 1700.

Strictly speaking, “anti-Semitism” could be thought to refer to any peoples who speak Semitic languages, which would include Arabs as well as Jews. But I’m going to stick to the usual, dictionary definition: “hostility toward Jews.”

During the epoch of industrial capitalism and of the bourgeois revolution in western Europe, the now-confident capitalist class had less need for anti-Semitism. The French Revolution emancipated the Jews from legal discrimination. The remaining Jewish populations in western Europe were absorbed into the broad range of economic life and partially assimilated. Examples of this are the families of Felix Mendelssohn, the composer, and of Karl Marx. This phase lasted through most of the 19th century.

### **The second rise of Anti-Semitism**

In 1900, eastern Europe was a region of decaying feudalism and rising anti-Semitism. A majority of the world’s Jews lived there, and received the brunt of anti Semitic discrimination through enforcement of laws and also through pogroms — massive violent attacks on Jews and their environment.

As a result, four million Jews fled from eastern Europe by 1930, of which three million went to the U.S. and only 100,000 to Palestine. Jewish communities were rebuilt in western Europe due to this immigration. There, they encountered new rise of anti-Semitism. Capitalism in Europe was now challenged by powerful workers' and socialist movements. Right-wing forces made the Jews the scapegoats for capitalist crisis, blaming the evils of the society on rich Jews.

By the 1930s, most European Jews were no longer in commerce but were part of the wage-earning working class, though still isolated in their own communities. But anti-Semitism, as Lenin pointed out, was based on the *memory* of Jews as money-lenders and merchants in feudal times even though the reality of this role had passed away. Anti-Semitism now evolved into a form of racism. And, as we know, racism is a central element in capitalist ideology, and is used to divide working people against each other.

### **An ideological disguise**

In the 1930s, capitalism fell into total economic and social crisis the world over. Germany's rulers handed power to Hitler, whose mission was to save the capitalist system through an anti-Jewish crusade.

Racism also provided a rationale for imperialism's need and desire to expand and conquer new markets and sources of raw materials. Anti-Semitism now became as an ideological disguise of modern imperialism. The Nazis pursued the German ruling class's longstanding program to conquer and colonize eastern Europe and destroy the Soviet Union, exterminating the Jewish communities as part of a massive slaughter.

If anyone here has ever looked at a \$50 bill, you will see the mug of one of Canada's prime ministers — Mackenzie King. He warmly praised Hitler, at a time when anti-Semitism was endemic in Canada. His views were openly expressed in Canada's racist immigration policy.

### **The Zionist project**

Zionism arose as a response to this second wave of anti-Semitism. Zionism is a secular political strategy, not a religious belief system. It was a call to the Jews who suffered unrelenting persecution to find a new homeland outside Europe.

At first, Zionism was a minority current among Jewish people in Europe, less influential among the workers than socialist organizations like the Bund and the Russian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks who looked to the world working-class movement for liberation. Zionism gained strength through the experience of Nazism, which encompassed not only the Nazi annihilation of the Jewish communities in most of Europe but the collusion of Canada, the U.S., and other Allied governments in denying refuge to the persecuted Jews. Zionists pointed to the World War II exterminations and discrimination as proof that Jews who lived in the Diaspora needed their own country to live in peace without persecution.

But, where did the Zionists get the idea that they could settle in a land already occupied by Palestinians? They got it from their sponsors and tutors, the colonizing powers — Britain, the United States, France, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands — that had been colonizing the world for centuries.

Zionism became an integral part of the imperialist drive in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to subjugate and colonize the Middle East. In 1916, British imperialism gave official support to the Zionist project in order to further Britain's plans for conquest. As Theodore Herzl, founder of modern Zionism said, "We should be there (in Palestine) to form a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism."

Following the Second World War, the imperialists sponsored the formation of the state of Israel in order to obtain a stronghold against the rise of Arab nationalism and to strengthen their grip on Mideast oil.

### **Anti-Semitism today**

Today, official anti-Semitism in Canada and other imperialist countries has been dismantled. There is no longer a quota for Jewish admission to Canadian universities. Immigration policy no longer discriminates against Jews. Jews are now admitted to all Toronto's golf clubs. It is no longer against the law in Toronto to make a speech in Yiddish.

These are gains of by the working class in its struggle against discrimination. But anti-Semitism persists as a component of racist ideology. It remains part of the baggage of radical rightist groups, and is expressed, although cautiously, by influential right-wing politicians like Patrick Buchanan in the U.S. or Jean-Marie Le Pen in France.

When capitalism once again feels the need to breath life into such currents, anti-Semitism will be a strong part of their appeal.

### **Zionism breeds Anti-Semitism**

Meanwhile, there is another kind of anti-Jewish feeling at work today, arising from the Zionist state's war against the Palestinians. The Zionist state carries out its crimes in the name of the Jewish people and conscripts Israeli Jews to enforce this oppression.

It is understandable that many victims of Zionism feel resentment against Jews. The crimes of Zionism have made it possible for reactionary forces to use the anti-Zionist feelings as the bases for anti-Semitic demagoguery, which tends to divert and weaken the Palestinian struggle. But this is not the same thing as the anti-Semitism that is part of imperialist ideology.

### **Who is the enemy?**

The enemy is Zionism and imperialism, not the Jewish people. The Palestinian liberation movement itself has never been motivated by anti-Semitism. It simply wants the right for the Palestinian people to live in peace on their native land. And the Arab communities of North Africa and the Middle East had no share in guilt for the Holocaust, which is today misused and abused to justify Zionist oppression. Yet Zionist aggression has sparked widespread anti-Jewish feelings in the Mideast today.

This problem finds expression in the imperialist countries as well. For example, the Jewish community of France is now subject to harassment and acts of violence not only from France's own anti-Semitic movements, but on occasion from individuals of Arab origin who wrongly identify Jews with the oppression and discrimination they suffer in France.

Imperialism jumps on such discussions to build hatred of Islamic peoples. Sometimes, it resorts to sheer invention. For example, the *National Post* (May 19, 2006) fans the flames of working class divisions and antagonisms with a sensationally featured report headlined, “Iran Eyes Badges for Jews.” The next day, the *Post* shamefacedly admitted — under much smaller headline — that the report was entirely without foundation. It offered no apology.

The best response to this problem is to redouble solidarity, especially within the Jewish community, with the Palestinians and with Muslim victims of oppression in the imperialist countries such as in France, the U.S., and Canada. We must also oppose every manifestation of Islamophobia — another attempt by imperialism to use racism to divide working people. Imperialism has used 9/11 to launch a witch hunt against the peoples of the Middle East. We should defend the five Muslims who have been detained and jailed for years in Canada on secret evidence of conspiracy in 9/11. We should stand for equal rights for the Islamic people who wish to practice their religion. We should oppose Canada’s dirty war in Afghanistan and the new threats against Iran.

### **Do Zionists run the U.S. government?**

We often say, “Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitic.” But there’s a form of anti-Zionism today supported by some on the Left that opens the door to anti-Semitism. This is the argument that Zionists control U.S. foreign policy.

A paper by Harvard academic dean Stephen Walt and University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer, entitled *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, promotes the theory that U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East is manipulated by a Jewish lobby with support from a network of “neoconservative gentiles.” The paper has aroused wide controversy. Walt and Mearsheimer, longtime spokespersons for U.S. foreign policy, seek to absolve themselves from responsibility for its failures. Israel and its supporters are being used as convenient scapegoats for America’s disastrous policies in the Middle East.

This is what we should expect from pro-imperialist theorists. More surprising, however, is the fact that some of the left echo these views. James Petras, a professor and a well-known writer identified with Marxist views, asserts that Jews are disproportionately represented among finance capitalists resulting in an equally disproportionate Jewish influence over U.S. foreign policy. His recent article, “The Tyranny of Israel Over America,” quotes anonymous FBI “sources” to claim “large-scale deep penetration of American society and the government by Israeli spies and their collaborators.” He goes on to say that a “significant affluent minority of prominent Jewish banking and real estate millionaires are active in financing and promoting Israeli policy either directly or through pro-Israel lobbies.”

These agents, Petras says, fed “disinformation” to persuade Washington to launch the war against Iraq. Petras describes the invasion of Iraq as a war “in the service of Israel” that went against “U.S. good sense and national interest.” He calls for the “re-founding of an American Republic ‘free from foreign entanglements.’”

Petras’s views have been endorsed by one of Canada’s prominent left publications, *Canadian Dimension*. These views are echoed also on the U.S. left-wing website *Counterpunch*.

### **Can the tail wag the dog?**

How is it possible for the tiny Israeli state to force the world's mightiest empire to act against its own interests? How can the tail wag the dog? Petras admits this is a "paradox." The explanation, he says, "is found in the powerful and influential role of pro-Israeli Jews in strategic sectors of the U.S. economy, political parties, Congress and executive branch."

What is this but a cleaned-up version of the notorious anti-Semitic theory of a world Jewish conspiracy? This conspiracy theory leaves the U.S. capitalist class and the profit system off the hook as the root cause of the ruinous conditions imposed on working people worldwide. And it encourages reactionary U.S. nationalism and hatred of Jews.

Surely, there is a rational, obvious explanation for the close U.S. alliance with Israel: Hasn't Israel proven to be a reliable and an effective defender of U.S. interests in the Mideast? Surely the Iraq war has a more obvious explanation than a Zionist plot: Isn't it a result of Washington's drive to conquer the oil-rich Middle East?

U.S. imperialism's foreign policy, far from being hijacked by some small country, is controlled by and represents the interests of a class: the wealthy billionaire families and industrialists who rule the U.S., including both their parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

### **Zionism threatens Jewish survival**

Zionism represents a dangerous trap for the Jewish people. It maintains that Israel is a secure and necessary haven for Jews in this world. But Israel's existence is based on the conquest of the majority by a minority and that it must protect its conquest by reliance on imperialism. It cannot exist without the assistance of U.S. imperialism — and imperialism is a dying system.

Zionism is a trap for the Jews. Today, Israel is the most dangerous place in the world for Jews to live.

Many Israelis recoil at the suggestion of a parallel with South Africa's apartheid system of institutionalized racism because it stabs at the heart of how they see themselves and their country, founded after centuries of hatred, pogroms and ultimately genocide. But hope for the Jews lies in making common cause with other victims of oppression. This is shown by my personal experience.

I was born to a Jewish family in France during the Second World War. The French Vichy government was then rounding up Jews, solely because of their religious and ethnic background, and deporting them to Hitler's concentration camps. That's how my mother landed in Auschwitz and died in the gas chamber.

I am alive today, like thousands of other Jewish children of the time, thanks to the anti-Nazi resistance in France. My mother had providently put me in the care of the Jewish resistance organization, itself part of a broader working-class resistance alliance. They placed me in the hands of a courageous peasant family, who hid me until the Liberation. The resistance united people of many political persuasions and religious beliefs: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim — for there were many Muslims in the French resistance. It united Jews with socialists and other anti-

Nazi fighters. It saved the lives of thousands of Jewish children in France. And this resistance struck heavy blows against French anti-Semitism, which are felt to this day.

Today we must join in a similar broad alliance, this time to defend the Palestinians and to oppose Zionism and imperialism. In doing this, we also strike blows against anti-Semitism. The Zionists' aggressive policies in the Middle East are against the interests of Jewish people and Palestinians alike, all of whom have a stake in a peaceful and united Middle East. Palestinian liberation offers the Jewish people in the Middle East the prospect of brotherhood and peace.

As Lenin said in the message I quoted earlier, "Shame on those who foment hatred toward the Jews, who foment hatred toward other nations. Long live the fraternal trust and fighting alliance of the workers of all nations in the struggle to overthrow capitalism."

Socialist Voice #101, June 13, 2006

## **The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas: Dawn of an Alternative to Neoliberalism? (Introduction)**

**by Paul Kellogg**

*Editors' Note: The following is an excerpt from the Introduction of a paper on ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, by Paul Kellogg, editor of Socialist Worker and a leading member of the International Socialists. It was first presented to the June 1-3, 2006 conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, at York University in Toronto.*

*The full paper considerably longer than a normal issue of Socialist Voice, so we have posted it separately.*

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In December 2004, Fidel Castro Ruz, president of the Council of State and Ministers of Cuba, and Hugo Chávez Frías, president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, signed an historic agreement, which outlined a framework for trade relations between their two countries on principles not just different from those motivating the FTAA, but principles which were formulated in such a way as to explicitly challenge the FTAA. ALBA has become synonymous with the radical reforms underway in Venezuela, and a symbol of the hopes for radical transformation which have emerged with the move left in Latin America as a whole.

ALBA — the Spanish acronym for the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas — means “dawn” in Spanish. And there is a real feeling that what we are witnessing is what Chávez has called “the dawn of a new era” in Latin America — an alternative at last to the long night of neoliberalism, neocolonialism and imperialism.

But ALBA is not the only player in the field of alternatives to the FTAA — nor is it necessarily, in economic terms, the most important. Just before the ALBA declaration, President Chávez participated in another summit of Latin American heads of states, this one without the presence of Castro, where agreement was reached, in principle, to accelerate progress towards a South American Community of Nations (CSN).

Most analysts conflate these two processes, treating them as identical. And at one level, they are. And both do represent a huge alteration of the power relations in the hemisphere. Both represent the attempt to wrench economic development out of the control of the Great Powers — in particular the United States — and assert the sovereignty of the economies in the region. But if both are, in this sense, anti-imperialist, only ALBA is explicitly anti-neoliberal and at times anti-capitalist. The CSN, by contrast, is evolving in a very traditional manner — state capital in cooperation with multinational capital. The ALBA project is being driven by Venezuela — led by a president who has situated himself openly against neoliberalism. But at the heart of the CSN

project is the Brazilian state, and its much bigger economy — led by a president who began his term in office with an open retreat towards neoliberal policies.

This article will ask the question, to what extent are the two projects compatible?

Socialist Voice #102, June 13, 2006

## **The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas: Dawn of an Alternative to Neoliberalism?**

By Paul Kellogg [1]

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### **Introduction: the impasse of the FTAA**

At the turn of the century, we were confronted with an apparently unstoppable steam-roller – the onward march of “trade deals”, marking the institutionalization of the hegemony of free-market capitalism in its neoliberal form. The two-country Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) had prepared the ground for the three-country North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which in turn was bulldozing an area to accommodate the hemispheric Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). There were many schools of thought about these trade deals, but many saw the planting of the banners of ever-more comprehensive trade arrangements as indicators of the onward march of neoliberalism.

At the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001, 80,000 demonstrators braved tear gas and pepper spray expressing outrage against the most comprehensive of these, the FTAA. Only Venezuela, inside the Summit, and Cuba outside (because not invited), opposed the deal. The date we were all focusing on was 2005. “In December 1994, at the first Summit of the Americas, the 34 democratically elected Heads of State of the Western Hemisphere agreed to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas by 2005.” [2] Momentum towards the FTAA seemed unstoppable, and 2005 loomed as an immovable deadline. But 2005 has come and gone, and the FTAA project is in tatters. At the 2005 Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata Argentina, George Bush

attempted one last time to revive the FTAA, but the whole thing “ended in a fiasco”[3] with the FTAA project in tatters.

The inability of the US to impose its will on Latin America, and push through the FTAA, is hugely significant. In broad strokes, it seems to have three roots. First, the long-term decline of the economic reach of the United States, relative to its leading rivals. Second, the conjunctural impasse of the United States in Iraq and Central Asia, reducing, for the moment, its capacity to assert its authority elsewhere, including in what used to be considered its “backyard” – Latin America. Third, the re-emergence of powerful mass movements throughout Latin America, that have propelled to office various left-wing and populist governments, usually on an explicitly anti-neoliberal basis.

However, the purpose of this article is not to embark on an explanation of this extraordinary conjuncture – that is a much bigger project. What this article will attempt to do is outline the contours of the trade deals which are emerging in the wake of the decline of the FTAA. First, it will examine a radically different form of regional integration, ALBA, or the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. [4] In December 2004, Fidel Castro Ruz, president of the Council of State and Ministers of Cuba, and Hugo Chávez Frías, president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, signed an historic agreement, which outlined a framework for trade relations between their two countries on principles not just different from those motivating the FTAA, but principles which were formulated in such a way as to explicitly challenge the FTAA. ALBA has become synonymous with the radical reforms underway in Venezuela, and a symbol of the hopes for radical transformation which have emerged with the move left in Latin America as a whole.

ALBA – the Spanish acronym for the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas – means “dawn” in Spanish. And there is a real feeling that what we are witnessing is what Chávez has called “the dawn of a new era” in Latin America[5] – an alternative at last to the long night of neoliberalism, neocolonialism and imperialism.

But ALBA is not the only player in the field of alternatives to the FTAA – nor is it necessarily, in economic terms, the most important. Just before the ALBA declaration, President Chávez participated in another summit of Latin American heads of states, this one without the presence of Castro, where agreement was reached, in principle, to accelerate progress towards a South American Community of Nations (CSN).

Most analysts conflate these two processes, treating them as identical. And at one level, they are. And both do represent a huge alteration of the power relations in the hemisphere. Both represent the attempt to wrench economic development out of the control of the Great Powers – in particular the United States – and assert the sovereignty of the economies in the region. But if both are, in this sense, anti-imperialist, only ALBA is explicitly anti-neoliberal and at times anti-capitalist. The CSN, by contrast, is evolving in a very traditional manner – state capital in cooperation with multinational capital. The ALBA project is being driven by Venezuela – led by a president who has situated himself openly against neoliberalism. But at the heart of the CSN project is the Brazilian state, and its much bigger economy – led by a president who began his term in office with an open retreat towards neoliberal policies.

This article will ask the question, to what extent are the two projects compatible? These issues have now become acutely important. April 30, newly-elected president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, met with Chávez and Castro in Havana, to formally bring Bolivia into the ALBA pact.[6] May 1, hard on the heels of the ALBA deal, Morales sent in the troops to take control of “53 energy installations – including gas fields, pipelines and refineries.” “The pillage of our natural resources by foreign companies is over,”[7] declared Morales as his troops went in. Morales was instantly in a confrontation with some of the world’s biggest energy concerns – including the Spanish-Argentine company Repsol YPF, British Gas, British Petroleum, France’s Total and US-based Exxon Mobil ... and Brazil’s Petrobras.

First, the principles of ALBA will be sketched out. Second, the key components and dynamics of the much bigger CSN drive for Latin American regional integration will be examined. Finally, the paper will ask the question whether these two initiatives can co-exist. Something very big is taking place in Latin America, and one part of the picture is the emergence of new, regionally-based alternatives to the FTAA. Regardless of how we evaluate these processes, it is clear that the long-time hegemonic control over the region, enjoyed by the United States, is now being challenged. In that sense at least, what we are seeing is the “dawn” of a new era in the region.

### **The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas**

First, what is the “Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas”? According to the (almost) always anonymous writers in *The Economist*, ALBA “consists mainly of cheap oil and a rhetorical declaration against poverty” [8] But is the opprobrium from *The Economist* motivated by the merits (or perceived demerits) of ALBA or because of the ideology which it represents? According to Chávez, ALBA is “a flexible model for the integration of Latin America that places social concerns in the forefront.” [9] The text of the agreement signed between Venezuela and Cuba, December 14, 2004, shows clearly that – at least as it is worded – Chávez is completely right, and it is an agreement that, by speaking in explicitly anti-neoliberal terms, would of course raise the ire of *The Economist*.

The document uses language not usually associated with bilateral trade deals. Cooperation between the two countries will be based “not only on solidarity principles ... but also ... on the exchange of goods and services that are most beneficial for the economic and social needs of both countries.” [10] This “trade” document puts front and centre important social issues. The two countries agree to work together to eliminate illiteracy. Cuba offers, as part of the trade deal, “2,000 university scholarships a year to Venezuelan young students”. In addition, “Cuba puts at the disposal of the Bolivarian University ... more than 15,000 medical professionals.” The two countries agree to “collaborate in health care programs for third countries.” And where traditional trade deals use language like “comparative advantage”, ALBA instead argues that “the political, social, economic and legal asymmetries of both countries have been taken into account.” And in what is perhaps, economically at least, the document’s most innovative position, “both governments accept the possibility of compensated trade” – opening the door to an exchange of goods bypassing the financial markets. [11]

Just over four months later, at the first Cuba-Venezuela meeting for the application of the ALBA, a series of stunning decisions were announced. The meeting was held under the rubric of Article 3 from the original ALBA agreement, which states:

*Both countries will draft a strategic plan to guarantee the most beneficial productive complementation based on rationality, the existing advantages on both sides, economy of resources, increase of useful labor, access to markets, and other considerations based on a true solidarity that would promote the strength of both parties. [12]*

Among the many initiatives, it was agreed to:

- in the healthcare sector – establish in Venezuela more than 1,000 healthcare centres of various sorts that would offer services free of charge; train in Venezuela 40,000 doctors and 5,000 health technology specialists; train in Cuba, 10,000 Venezuelans in medicine and nursing; continue the work of 30,000 Cuban doctors and other healthcare workers located in Venezuela; and offer free eye surgery in Cuba to 100,000 Venezuelans:
- in the education sector – continue Cuban-Venezuelan collaboration to eliminate illiteracy in Venezuela (a project involving teaching 1.46 million Venezuelans to read and write); work with 1.262 million Venezuelans to upgrade their studies to the sixth-grade level; and work with high school students to help give them access to university:
- in the economy – “the two delegations also identified 11 projects for the establishment of joint ventures and other methods of economic complementation in Cuba and Venezuela which will be progressively formalized once studies underway confirm their economic viability” including initiatives in iron and steel, railway infrastructure; maritime transport (including enlargement of the supertanker base in Matanzas, Cuba), nickel and cobalt mining, and the repair and construction of sea vessels.

The concluding words of the document are worth quoting in full.

*[B]oth delegations formally pledge to spare no effort until the dream of Bolívar and Martí of a Latin united and integrated America and Caribbean is attained. As the Joint Declaration expresses: “...we fully agree that the ALBA will not become a reality with mercantilist ideas or the selfish interests of business profitability or national benefit to the detriment of other peoples. Only a broad Latin Americanist vision, which acknowledges the impossibility of our countries’ developing and being truly independent in an isolated manner, will be capable of achieving what Bolívar called “...to see the formation in the Americas of the greatest nation in the world, not so much for its size and riches as for its freedom and glory,” and that Martí conceived of as “Our America,” to differentiate it from the other America, the expansionist one with imperialist appetites.[13]*

The whole ALBA process, then, does not just implicitly challenge neoliberalism and the FTAA. That challenge is explicit, and embedded in the very founding documents of the ALBA process.

A more formal articulation of the ALBA philosophy was prepared in February, 2005, by the Venezuelan Bank of External Commerce (Bancoex). This document argues that “ALBA places the emphasis on the fight against the poverty [sic] and against social exclusion”. Bancoex

situates ALBA as an international trade extension of the philosophy and politics of the Bolivarian state.

The Bolivarian Government of Venezuela is against the processes of liberalization, deregulation and privatization that limit the capacity of the State and the Government to design and to execute policies in defense of the right of our people to have access to essential services of good quality and at good prices ... For the Bolivarian Government of Venezuela, the public services [sic] are for satisfying the needs of people, not for commerce and economic profit. Therefore, its benefit cannot be governed by the criteria of profit but by social interest.[14]

The document argues that recognizing and “correcting asymmetries” between participating countries has to be at the centre of the development and application of ALBA. “The idea is to help the weakest countries to overcome the disadvantage that separates them from the most powerful countries of the hemisphere.”[15] To this end, Bancoex argues for the creation of “Compensatory Funds of Structural Convergence”. Teresa Arreaza calls this the “corner stone in the design of ALBA”, a mechanism to ensure that trade relations don’t become the institutionalization of a hierarchy of nations, but a mechanism for the leveling of that hierarchy, in the interests of the poorest and smallest economies.[16] In a certain sense, this would be like the system of Equalization payments that are at the heart of Canadian federalism – only on a hemispheric basis, and imbued with a distrust of traditional trade deals – Equalization on anti-neoliberal steroids.

### **A direct challenge to neoliberalism, a partial challenge to capitalism**

Neoliberalism is an orientation towards capitalist rule that developed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with implications for both the Global North and the Global South. This paper is only going to deal with its implications for the Global South, and those implications are profound. They represent a continuation of the terrible impact of imperialism on development prospects for the poorest two-thirds of the world economy. Eduardo Galeano in his classic *Open Veins of Latin America* captures the impact of imperialism on Latin America very well. “The division of labour among nations is that some specialize in winning and others in losing.”[17] A 1999 cartoon published in *Sierra Magazine*, shows a woman with a cup of coffee, signaling to the waiter: “Excuse me waiter, there’s the blood and misery of a thousand small farmers in my coffee.”[18] It is in this context that the modern set of policies called neoliberalism, must be situated. Mark Engler has provided a good short, working definition of neoliberalism (as it effects the Global South) – “a specific set of market driven economic policies that have been imposed on the developing world. These include tight monetary policy, privatization of public industries, lowering safeguards for workers, opening markets to foreign investment and competition, and ending government protections for local industry.”[19] The Campaign for Labor Rights, among others, has highlighted the way in which all of this involves a threat not just to workers, but to peasants as well. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), they argue:

*... would, in a short period of time, remove all tariff barriers on imported agricultural products. This would allow cheaply grown and heavily subsidized U.S. corn and other basic grains to flood local markets in Central America. Millions of small farmers there would face the extinction*

*of their livelihoods. They would be forced to migrate to large urban areas to work in the informal sector or maquilas.[20]*

And on the eve of the 2001 FTAA summit in Quebec City, Karen Hansen-Kuhn succinctly outlined the way in which a trade deal like the FTAA would institutionalize neoliberalism. Plans for the FTAA developed by the U.S. Trade Representative's office (USTR) included:

*... the controversial 'investor-state' provision ... which grants corporations legal status formerly reserved for nations ... When this sweeping procedural right to challenge governmental regulatory actions is coupled with the broad and vaguely worded investor protections in Chapter 11 of NAFTA, virtually all government regulation becomes a potential target. ... In an outline of its objectives leaked last year, the FTAA services negotiating group stated its goal to liberalize all services in all sectors – i.e. commercial services such as tourism, data processing, and financial transactions, as well as public services at all levels of government. ... This approach could lead to the privatization of such public services as health and education – particularly if a government has opened the door to commercialization of the services by allowing some aspects to be subcontracted to private service providers. The USTR proposal calls for the inclusion of energy services, something excluded from NAFTA, and it fails to address the possible environmental consequences of such a move. [21]*

The ALBA initiatives taken to date challenge every aspect of this neoliberalism. As such, they represent the beginning of a challenge to imperialism itself. The role of the state is asserted rather than the role of the corporation. The primacy of using the state to extend and deepen social services is asserted, rather than opening up these services to the uncertain mercies of the world market. Energy security is seen as being in the purview of the state, and not something, again, left to the "logic" of the market. Not only are local industries and small peasants not abandoned, the protection of each is asserted in the ALBA initiatives taken so far. And while workers' rights have not yet been explicitly dealt with, these rights are enshrined in an unprecedented way in the new constitution of Venezuela, and ALBA is in a very real way an extension of the reforms undertaken to date in Venezuela.

Susan George has argued that prior to the advent of neoliberalism:

*The idea that the market should be allowed to make major social and political decisions; the idea that the State should voluntarily reduce its role in the economy, or that corporations should be given total freedom, that trade unions should be curbed and citizens given much less rather than more social protection – such ideas were utterly foreign.[22]*

George is probably exaggerating to make a point. But it is certainly true that the extreme extension of market rule – giving corporations rights while stripping them from workers, peasants and governments – has been far more marked in the modern, neoliberal era, than in the earlier one that we can perhaps call Keynesian.

At the very least, ALBA represents an attempt to return to that earlier, Keynesian, era, where governments imposed limits on corporate rule, and workers, peasants and the poor had some scope to legitimately organize in defence of their own rights. This does not in itself go beyond

the bounds of capitalism. Keynesianism and the “welfare-state” era, did, after all, come to fruition during the most powerful economic boom ever experienced by the capitalist system.

But one aspect of ALBA goes even further than this and does amount to a challenge to the logic of capitalism itself. Institutionalizing the possibility of “trade in kind” between countries is a direct assault on the money-based trading networks that have dominated the world since the emergence of capitalism. Cuban ambassador to the U.N., Orlando Requeijo said in 2005 that “ALBA is based on the integrative, complementary use of resources. Some of the things we are trying to do are to end customs tariffs between the two countries, develop industries both in Cuba and Venezuela and we trade in kind or in other currencies. We do not have to rely on the U.S. dollar for anything.”[23] This puts trade and economic relationships between countries on a completely different footing from that imposed by capitalism. Instead of being at the mercy of price movements, countries can openly identify areas of economic need, openly discuss what economic strengths they possess to “trade” for goods and services that they need, and directly exchange those goods and services without recourse to money. In such an arrangement, there is no room for banks, currency speculators or private-capitalists. Capital accumulation retreats into the background and the articulated needs of each country’s peoples moves to the foreground – at least in theory. It is an extraordinary and very bold assertion, of the possibility that a better world is in fact possible.

### **ALBA – Expanding the Scope**

“Why waste time ... in looking for answers ‘in the air’, since ALBA ... ‘is the answer?’”[24] This was the advice from Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Cuban National Assembly, speaking January 25 on the opening panel of the 2006 World Social Forum in Caracas. Alarcón was capturing, without question, the massive enthusiasm with which ALBA has been received by the social movements. And there are some signs that this enthusiasm is justified. From its base in Venezuela and Cuba, ALBA-type relations have begun to spread.

In late 2005, Chávez proposed a joint energy initiative – Petrocaribe – focused on the Caribbean countries. It quickly met with “an enthusiastic response” and as of November, 2005 “a dozen countries have signed on”. [25] The key to the deal is easy credit and low-interest rates for Caribbean states buying Venezuelan oil. As oil prices rise, countries will be eligible to borrow a greater and greater portion of the total cost – from 5 per cent if oil falls below \$20 a barrel, to a maximum of 50 per cent if oil prices top US\$100 a barrel. In addition, loans can be repaid over a 17 to 25 year period at an interest rate frozen at 1 per cent. Critics call this a “buy now, pay later” deal, saying that this will increase the debts of the already indebted, and very poor, countries in the Caribbean. [26] This criticism falls down on several counts, one of them being simple arithmetic. Given that there are many, many investments where returns far greater than 1 per cent are possible, the enthusiasm of the Caribbean states is understandable. In effect, money borrowed from Venezuela at 1 per cent can be invested elsewhere for a greater return – the type of activity that is normally reserved for the biggest trans-national banks. What the critics also ignore is that – instead of building up debt – Caribbean countries have the option of paying for the oil with “goods like sugar or bananas, or services.”[27]

With the election of Evo Morales as president of Bolivia, a third country has entered the ALBA mix. From looking north to the Caribbean, ALBA has now spread south to Bolivia, with Bolivia's formal adherence to ALBA, April 30, 2006. Prior to that, in January 24, 2006, Venezuela and Bolivia signed eight agreements, in their specifics and in their totality, reminiscent of the ALBA-inspired Venezuela-Cuba deals outlined above.

The most important of the deals is for an exchange of Bolivian foodstuffs for Venezuelan oil. Chávez agreed to send as much as 200,000 barrels of diesel a month to Bolivia. The Venezuelan Energy Minister, Rafael Ramirez, said this oil can be paid for by agricultural products. On top of this, Venezuela said it will use money to buy 200,000 tons of soy and 20,000 tons of chicken more a year than it currently does.

*Bolivia has also accepted Venezuelan assistance with energy development. Chávez said that PDVSA, the Venezuelan state oil company will be available to advise Bolivia on energy policy. [28]*

### **ALBA – Stretching the Definition**

This is a remarkable story – Venezuela, Cuba, some Caribbean island economies and now Bolivia, all engaging in trade relations on the basis of explicitly anti-neoliberal policies – or more accurately, on the basis of policies which explicitly challenge the “trickle-down” free-market logic of neoliberalism.

But there are many commentators who go further than this. The ALBA-led re-organization of the southern section of the Americas is often extended far beyond the examples listed here. I will quote these at some length, because the point is important – ALBA is often (perhaps usually) seen in far broader terms than has been painted here in this paper.

*The Economist* equates Petrosur, Petrocaribe, and “Petroamérica (in Central America and Mexico)” seeing all as “part of a broader plan to form ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) as a response to the US-initiated attempt to create a Free-Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).”[29]

Pedro Monreal, writing in *NACLA Report on the Americas*, outlines the ALBA-inspired agreements between Venezuela and Cuba, but then goes on to argue that “the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) is conceived as a much larger process of alternative integration for Latin America and the Caribbean ... To this end, the ALBA has taken notable strides ... through the PetroCaribe and PetroSur energy agreements.”[30]

Walden Bello and Marylou Malig quote Chávez without comment when, at the World Social Forum, he (Chávez) equated Petrocarib and Petrosur. “In his Petrocarib initiative, 13 countries in the Caribbean importing Venezuelan oil get a 40% discount off the international market price of oil. In the Petrosur project, Bolivia exchanges soybeans and Argentina trades cattle for Venezuelan oil. This [sic] kind of exchanges, he underlined, go ‘beyond the logic of capitalism.’”[31]

Peter Hakim, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, lists – as ALBA inspired initiatives – not just Petrocaribe but also Venezuela's entry into full partnership in MERCOSUR “South America's

most important free-trade zone, which also includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, as well as the proposed “creation of Petrosur, which would be a confederation of the region’s state-owned petroleum companies.”[32]

Stephen Lendman also links ALBA and MERCOSUR. “Venezuela has recently joined with Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay in the MERCOSUR trading alliance that should strengthen ALBA.”[33] Sheila D. Collins, in the *New Political Science*, takes the analogy beyond MERCOSUR. Accurately describing ALBA as a trade agreement which is “based on social solidarity and justice”, she goes on to state:

*While Cuba is thus far the only nation to have fully accepted the ALBA, other countries in the region have been moving toward it in their own way. In a Latin American summit held in December 2005, 12 countries signed an accord to merge the region’s two trading blocs, the Andean Community of Nations and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) into a single South American Community of Nations (CSN).[34]*

Néstor Sánchez makes the same point, saying that “Petrosur will also be part of other regional initiatives such as MERCOSUR, the South American Community of Nations and ALBA, which is an alternative to the FTAA.[35]

These are very large claims. ALBA is to be seen not simply as a series of bilateral deals between Venezuela and some of the smaller states in the region, but it is to be seen in conjunction with the much more ambitious region-wide initiatives such Petrosur, pre-existing institutions like MERCOSUR, and proposed extremely ambitious institutions like the South American Community of Nations. To see if this approach is justified, we need to turn and examine the essence of these much larger regional integration initiatives.

### **The South American Community of Nations**

At the centre of this investigation is the South American Community of Nations. December 9, 2004, “the leaders of every South American country except the three Guyanas were gathering today in Ayacucho, Peru [and the nearby Cuzco] to sign the preamble to the Foundation Act of the South American Union.”[36] This new entity, tentatively titled, the South American Community of Nations (CSN), would be a huge new fact in the world economy, if it ever came to fruition. It would incorporate a land area more than four times the size of the European Union, and only marginally smaller than that comprised in the three-country cartel called NAFTA. With 370 million people, it would trail the EU by 90 million, and NAFTA by 60 million. Its GDP of just under \$3 trillion reveals the big weakness of the new bloc, however, being less than 25 per cent of either NAFTA or the EU, despite being comparable in area and population.[37]

But is the CSN compatible with ALBA? One representative report said that the summit of South American leaders “will pledge to merge the continent’s two largest trading blocs over the next 10 to 15 years, with the eventual goal of creating a Latin American version of the European Union”[38] The CSN incorporates the two existing trade blocs in the region, MERCOSUR and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN). It is significant that Cuba “does not participate in regional integration schemes that function within the neoliberal capitalist matrix” including MERCOSUR, because the push for MERCOSUR and other such projects “surged or regained

momentum at the height of the so-called ‘Washington Consensus,’ which prescribed a diminished role for the state in social and economic affairs, privatization, deregulation, labor flexibilization and other drastic policies.”[39]

It is not only Cuba which shares an unease about MERCOSUR. December 9, 2005, Venezuela was admitted into MERCOSUR at its summit in Uruguay. In May of 2006, Chávez defended this move saying that this was a “mechanism for integration among the nations” a step in creating “a bloc necessary to turn South America into a power.”[40] This has not been met with unanimous praise from Chavez supporters. Julio Turra, member of the National Executive Committee of the United Workers Federation (CUT) of Brazil argued, in an open letter to Chávez, that the move was being questioned by activists in the workers’ movement in his country. The very name of MERCOSUR, he argues, “Common Market of the South:”

*... indicates that it is a capitalist economic integration ... privatization has been the hallmark of MERCOSUR since the 1990s. In various regions of Brazil, small agriculture and milk production have been liquidated due to the penetration of the multinationals, which take advantage of “free trade.”[41]*

Having lived under MERCOSUR, Brazilian trade unionists know something of its neoliberal nature. And if MERCOSUR is at the heart of the CSN project, that concern is likely also to be most acutely felt by activists in Brazil. Prime mover for the CSN was not Venezuela’s anti-neoliberal Chávez, but Brazil’s very neoliberal Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who initiated the process leading towards the CSN while president of Brazil. The torch for the CSN – along with its neoliberal policies – was picked up by the president who replaced him, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Both of these presidents have been the subject of widespread unrest because of their neoliberal policies.

And the scope of the CSN completely dwarfs that of ALBA. At its heart is a continent-wide energy policy that will involve the construction of one of the biggest pipeline networks in world history. The construction of those pipelines has already raised enormous fears amongst environmentalists, who are well aware of the havoc which can be created by thousands of kilometres of gas and oil pipelines snaking their way through some of the most ecologically sensitive land in the world. And there is, at the very least, a deep unease among indigenous peoples in the region, through whose land much of these pipelines will travel. Finally, this massive energy investment will not clearly be controlled by the people of the region. Side by side with the big nationalized oil companies – PDVSA in Venezuela and Petrobras in Brazil – will be some of the world’s biggest and most notorious multinational energy corporations, including Chevron-Texaco and Occidental Petroleum.

### **Modeled on the EU, building on MERCOSUR**

At the historic, 2004 summit in Cuzco one quote captured the sentiment very clearly. “Our mirror will be the European Union, with all its institutions,” said Eduardo Duhalde, “a former president of Argentina who is now the political face of MERCOSUR.”[42] The invoking of the EU as a model for South American regionalism, raises the important question of the nature of the EU. Like NAFTA and the FTAA, it involves a notion of the necessity of creating a regional bloc,

a supra-national institution, to facilitate both regional economic development and competitiveness on a world scale. Unlike NAFTA and the FTAA, the EU has taken on a much more political role, through the creation of a European-wide parliament, shared passports, and the (attempt) at forging a European-wide constitution.

But the debate over that constitution has posed questions about the very nature of the EU process itself – particularly since the launching of the EURO as a region-wide currency, supplanting the existing national currencies. The advent of the EURO – and the parallel institutionalization of a European Central Bank at arms length from the political processes at a national level – have heightened concerns that the EU process, like NAFTA and the FTAA, has become yet another means for driving forward neoliberal restructuring. This problem has not been lost on activists in Latin America.

*What are the results of the policies of the European Union for the peoples of the old continent? All the state monopolies (electricity, gas, transport, etc.) are being liquidated for the benefit of the multinational corporations ... Social protection and pensions are on the chopping bloc in all the countries of the European Union. It was not by chance that the draft “Constitution” of the European Union was rejected by a massive “No” vote in France and Holland.[43]*

The problem is, that if these critiques of MERCOSUR and the EU are correct, they have profound implications for an evaluation of the CSN project. Central to the vision of the CSN, is that it will develop not in opposition to MERCOSUR, but by building on it, the Cuzco participants envisaging a “convergence of the two large commercial blocs: the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN)”.[44] But in 1995, a joint EU-MERCOSUR declaration stated that the goal of both was to conform to World Trade Organization (WTO) norms,[45] the same WTO which has been the principal target in the mass anti-neoliberal movement, at least since the Seattle protests of 1999. Adherence to WTO norms has real consequences. Collaboration between the EU and MERCOSUR was greatly enhanced from mid-1994 on “with Brazil launching a significant privatization process.”[46] . If this is central to the origins of the CSN, how can it be made compatible with the very anti-neoliberal ALBA project?

### **Brazil in the drivers’ seat**

In this, the role of Brazil is absolutely central. “The idea” of regional integration “resurfaced late last century ... with Brazil the leading proponent.” [47] The 2004 meeting which proclaimed the CSN, was the third in a series of South American presidential summits which had addressed the idea. The first was convened in 2000 by Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The 59-point Brasilia Declaration resulting from this first summit, had at its heart the goal of a South American union.[48] But what was behind this turn to regional integration on the part of the Brazilian leadership?

### **Neoliberalism in Brazil: from Cardoso to Lula**

Cardoso – convenor of the summit and prime mover of the Brasilia Declaration with its vision of regional integration – has been the symbol of neoliberalism in Latin America. The privatization campaign launched by Brazil in 1994, a campaign which was central to the “maturing” of

MERCOSUR as a neoliberal institution, was initiated by Cardoso, then Brazil's finance minister. First in this role, and then, beginning later the same year as president of Brazil, Cardoso became the leading representative of neoliberal orthodoxy on the entire continent. He, more than any other figure, was associated with Washington Consensus policies. Emir Sader has succinctly captured their essence.

*[D]evelopment would be led by foreign capital, attracted by the privatization of industry and natural resources, import liberalization, high interest rates, fiscal austerity and, in many cases, pegged currencies.[49]*

Cardoso was replaced as president in 2002 by the Workers' Party's Lula. But as Sader and others have clearly shown, Cardoso might have departed, but his neoliberal policies remained. Lula opened his rule with a promise to "keep all the previous government's financial commitments" which in effect meant prioritizing relations with Western financial institutions over social services and workers' living standards. The predictable consequence was an attack on both.

*[I]n its first year the Lula government gave priority to two reforms in the style of World Bank 'packages' on social security and tax. The first had a clear privatizing slant. A new tax was levied on the retired – who had already been paying all their lives – to reduce the social security deficit; and public-sector workers' pensions were capped, forcing them to turn to private pension funds.[50]*

Sader's conclusion on the basis of his quite detailed analysis, is that "In power, the PT has not fulfilled any of its historic aspirations, and cannot even be described as a government of the left".[51] This is extremely relevant to an analysis of the link between ALBA and the CSN. "The government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has been one of the driving forces behind the creation of the South American community of nations",[52] and Cardoso – the pre-eminent voice of neoliberalism – initiated the current round of negotiations pointing towards the South American Community of Nations. "The original concept" says Gwynne Dyer "came from Brazil's last president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who invited the other South American presidents to Brasilia in 2000 for a first-ever continental summit, but the idea has been vigorously backed by his successor, President Luis Inacio 'Lula' da Silva".[53] Dyer adds that the other enthusiast for the project is Chávez, but confuses the matter when he says "both men, unsurprisingly, are on the left". But the very point of the matter is – are they? Is the Brazilian drive for the CSN compatible with Chávez' drive for ALBA?

### **Brazil: a sub-imperialist power**

Brazil is today associated with the PT and Lula. It is a very short while ago, however, that Brazil was seen as a sub-imperial power. In part, this analysis situated Brazil as a local policeman for US interests in the region. But it also served to capture the aspiration of the Brazilian ruling class to be a regional hegemon, looking to assert its influence, on a capitalist basis, throughout the southern half of the Americas. As early as 1965, the Brazilian sociologist Ruy Mauro Marini was documenting the emergence of Brazil as a regional power in its own right. In part he saw Brazil's role in Latin America as an extension of the dominant role of North American imperialism. But

he insisted that even then, more than 40 years ago, it was insufficient to see this as a completely dependent relationship – Brazil acting as a surrogate for the United States.

*In its internal and foreign policy, the Brazilian military government has taken hardly any steps to accelerate the integration of the Brazilian into the North American economy; rather, it has expressed the intention of becoming the center from which imperialist expansion in Latin America will radiate ... It is not a question of passively accepting North American power (although the active correlation of forces often leads to that result), but rather of collaborating actively with imperialist expansion, assuming in this expansion the position of a key nation.[54]*

In 1994, Daniel Zirker re-examined Marini's concept of sub-imperialism, as it applied to Brazil, and concluded that "more than two decades after he first proposed it, Marini's theory of subimperialism continued to offer systematic insights into Brazilian foreign policy and domestic socioeconomic development." [55]

Is this any less relevant as a framework from which to examine Brazil's actions in the Cardoso and Lula years? One important study argues that Brazil "has demonstrated a clear intention of wanting to expand the roles that it plays and the responsibilities that it assumes ... Recent indications of this include its initiative towards the creation of a South American community." [56] Sean W. Burges puts it more bluntly. He calls the CSN "a largely Brazilian-led venture" which "may herald a future of dependence on an emergent regional Brazilian hegemony." [57]

The projection of Brazilian influence throughout the region is not simply taking the form of trade policies. The democratically-elected government of Haiti was overthrown in 2004, in a coup largely engineered by some of the traditional big imperialist powers of the west – the United States, France and Canada. But since the coup, Brazil has taken the lead in the occupation of Haiti, "sanctioning the controversial foreign intervention in which former Haitian President Jean-Bernard Aristide was removed from power. This sets a delicate precedent for the region, since many neighboring countries could potentially be considered candidates for intervention, due to serious institutional crises. Venezuela and Bolivia are just two examples" [58] Finally, Brazil's projection of its power regionally is underpinned by economic expansion. This is something well-known by the poor in Bolivia, who have engaged in "sustained mass protests ... against Brazilian exploitation of gas reserves, including the bombing of Petrobras' Santa Cruz office" [59] in 2005.

Phil Davison says that "Mr. Cardoso's successor, President Luis Inacio "Lula" da Siliva, has been the driving force" behind moves towards regional integration "with Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's President, in the front passenger seat." [60] But when the driver and the passenger disagree as to the direction of the car – it is the driver who usually wins.

### **Pipeline politics**

Chávez and the Bolivarian process in Venezuela have transformed the political landscape of Latin America. But it is oil and gas which are transforming the region's economic landscape. When the entire picture is sketched out, it is fairly clear that the political logic behind the push for regional integration is underpinned by a powerful economic logic represented by pipelines.

An examination of the smallest of these pipeline initiatives provides important insights into the dynamics in the region. Venezuela and Cuba are seen by the right-wing in the United States as its principal enemies in Latin America. “The emerging axis of subversion forming between Cuba and Venezuela must be confronted before it can undermine democracy in Colombia, Nicaragua, Bolivia, or another vulnerable neighbor,”[61] is a typical summary of the position taken by supporters of Bush and US imperialism.[62] And if Cuba and Venezuela are the “axis of subversion”, then, the key to US foreign policy is “one of the most democratic and successful leaders in the region, President Alvaro Uribe”[63] of Colombia, at least in the mind of former senior Bush advisor, Otto Reich.

The Colombian department of Arauco, is “the heartland of that country’s oil industry ... It lies just across the Rio Arauca, an Orinoco tributary, from Venezuela’s own Orinoco Basin oil heartland of Apure-Barinas states.”[64] Entrenched alongside Colombia’s state-run Ecopetrol is California-based Occidental Petroleum. And bunking next to them, are hundreds of US military advisors. Oscar Canas Fajardo, advisor to Colombia’s Central workers Union (CUT), said of the main oil field in Arauco: “There is a military build-up going on in Cano-Limon with the excuse of protecting the oil pipelines ... They are transforming the Cano-Limon facilities into a small military fort ... Who is to guarantee that all this [is] not being used against Venezuela?”[65]

But in spite of this, November 24, 2005, Chávez and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe signed a major agreement for a joint natural gas pipeline project. The 215 kilometre pipeline is designed to first, take natural gas from Colombia to Venezuela’s Paraguana Refinery Complex. After seven years, Colombia’s natural gas resources will be depleted, at which point the flow of gas will be reversed, and Venezuelan natural gas will flow to Colombia. Gas is just the start of the matter. Venezuela has easy access only to the Atlantic, but Colombia borders both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. The gas pipeline agreement is designed to be part of “a larger project that will bring crude oil from Venezuela to the Pacific Ocean, where it will then be transported to Asia.”[66]

The opening to Asia is absolutely critical. The United States is the biggest customer for Venezuela’s vast oil exports. But the United States is also that country’s most implacable enemy. If Venezuela can create an alternate market for its oil in the rapidly growing economies of Asia – particularly China and India – it hopes to free itself from dependence on US oil consumption. This possibility has not been lost on the US, for whom the prospect of losing Venezuelan oil is taken seriously indeed.

But this pipeline project is just the appetizer. January 21, 2006, the presidents of Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela jointly announced plans for a massive, 8,000 kilometre natural gas pipeline, that would snake through the Amazon and the environmentally-sensitive rain forests of South America’s interior, to pipe Venezuelan natural gas to markets, principally in Argentina and Brazil, but also linking Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. The project, if it goes ahead, would cost at least \$20-billion US, and possibly more, and take seven years to complete.

Part of the pipeline plan is to, by making available vast quantities of natural gas, encourage the conversion of automobiles from gasoline (petrol) to natural gas in the two big economies –

Argentina and Brazil. Argentina already has the world's largest fleet of natural gas cars, Brazil the second-largest. "According to Chávez, that shift alone would allow for a massive increase in gasoline exports by both Venezuela and Brazil, generating as much as \$15 billion in annual revenue." [67]

So Venezuela's side of the deal is clear – sell vast quantities of natural gas to new markets in Argentina and Brazil, and simultaneously begin the process of facilitating increased exports of oil to China, accessing the Pacific shipping routes by a deal with Colombia. [68] Brazil is not at the moment an oil exporter, so – at first glance it seems that for this country, the deal is only contingent on security of gas supply. And analysts have pointed out that this is a very expensive way of securing that supply.

But Brazil's big state-owned oil company, Petrobras, has embarked on a vast oil exploration program, and "is adding about 13 barrels of reserves for each one it extracts" which will "make Brazil a net exporter of oil for the first time" in 2006, according to Petrobras CEO Jose Sergio Gabrielli. [69] All of this is being fuelled by the China-led world economic expansion, driving oil prices through the roof, a situation which is leading to massive profits for oil producers. Petrobras, for instance, "recently announced the largest profits in Latin American business history, at \$11.2 billion." [70] So flooding Brazil with natural gas from Venezuela, converting automobiles from gasoline to natural gas, and thus freeing up oil for export – this is a plan that has dollar signs written all over it.

This extraordinary pipeline development project is the driving force behind the big energy alliances – Petrosur and Petroamérica. May 11, 2005, Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela "signed the base document for the creation of Petrosur" which "will be in charge of coordinating mutual energy policies". [71] Petrosur will be one of the key institutional players in the pipeline project, along with "the Initiative for South American Regional Infrastructure Integration (IIRSA), created by the nascent South American Community of Nations." [72] According to Dr. Alí Rodríguez Araque, president of Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA from 2002 to 2004 (and from March of 2004 on, Minister of Foreign Affairs), all of this is based on a perspective of "hemispheric energy integration" which envisions the creation of Petroamérica, an umbrella institution uniting Petrosur, Petroandina [73] and Petrocaribe. [74]

### **Conclusion: ALBA from below**

The scope of the projects outlined here is breathtaking – and very bold. If oil prices stay high – that is, if China can sustain its incredible growth, a growth which is fueling an upward spiral in demand for and price of oil – then this pipeline development strategy may just work. And if the pipeline strategy works, then it is absolutely conceivable that the South American Community of Nations could emerge as an independent actor on the stage of the world economy.

A real sense of urgency is driving these energy projects. Héctor Ciavaldini was "one of the first truly Chavista presidents of PDVSA" according to Christian Parenti. Says Ciavaldini, "if we do not get this right, we are doomed. I don't just mean the revolution, or Venezuela. I mean all of Latin America. If we fail, it means another century of misery, violence and hunger." [75]

The assertion of sovereignty against US-led imperialist hegemony is a step of enormous importance for Latin America, whether that step takes the form of the CSN or ALBA. Whatever form that assertion of sovereignty takes, it will be met with hostility from the US, whose role as hegemon in the region is being openly challenged, perhaps to the greatest extent in its long history of regional dominance. This looming confrontation between the US and Latin American attempts at regional integration is the defining aspect of the whole picture.

But it is nonetheless necessary to ask the question whether the CSN project is compatible with ALBA? “Another World Is Possible” has been the unifying slogan of the anti-neoliberal movement which is the necessary background to all of these events – a massive upheaval, particularly in Latin America, against the inroads of neoliberal capitalism. So it is right to ask, what is the new world being promised by the CSN?

It is, for starters, not clearly anti-capitalist. PDVSA – a corporation at the heart of the CSN project – might be a nationalized company, but that does not make it necessarily anti-capitalist. As Araque points out, the oil industry in Venezuela “rests on three pillars: state capital, national private capital and international private capital. Currently, over 50 international companies develop business in the hydrocarbon sector in Venezuelan territory.”[76] The Venezuela-Colombia pipeline will be built in conjunction with Chevron/Texaco.[77] Not all relations are smooth. On the weekend of April 1 and 2, 2006, Venezuela took control of the offices of Total S.A. “when the French company refused to sign an agreement to turn the site [at Jusepin] over to a state-run joint venture.”[78] This clearly represents in part a re-assertion of the state over the free-rein of the multinationals. But we know from the long experience of the twentieth-century, that state-ownership in itself is completely compatible with the logic of the capitalist market.

And there is a growing unease among indigenous peoples’ whose land is in the path of these pipelines. Carlos Tautz from the Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analyses (IBASE), stated: “We challenge the logic of this integration project: once again, it is an export-oriented trade integration. The projects affect sensitive social areas, which are seen as spaces for increasing the agricultural production for export purposes, which has a low commercial value and a high social and environmental impact.”[79]

Indigenous peoples’ concerns about the regional development projects are not confined to Brazil. January 27, 2006 towards the end of the World Social Forum, 2,000 demonstrators gathered in downtown Caracas. Some 150 indigenous protesters were joined by 2,000 WSF participants, including “activists from Brazil, Canada and Colombia.” They were protesting plans by the Venezuelan state-run company Carbozulia to begin mining coal along the Socuy River. One of the protest organizers, environmentalist Lusbi Portillo, said “we know the mine will degrade the environment ... in the area where indigenous communities live off the land.”

“What we want is for President (Hugo) Chávez to simply state that no concessions will be granted, and that the land that belongs to indigenous people will be formally awarded to them,” said Avelino Korombara, a member of the Bari community from an area near the Venezuelan-Colombia border.[80]

Chávez says that the pipeline agreement with Argentina and Brazil represents “the end of the Washington consensus ... It is the beginning of the South American consensus.”[81] Chávez is quite possibly right. Replacing neoliberalism with state-led economic development, attached to improvements in social welfare, is in complete contradiction to the neoliberalism represented by the Washington consensus – but it is well short of the “21st century socialism” that the promise of ALBA seems to embody. And we know, from bitter experience, that state-capitalism and social welfare reforms can lead to improved conditions for workers and the poor while the world economy booms – but can unravel in a terrible fashion when that boom falters.

Venezuela, Brazil and the other countries in the region are only asserting their sovereignty when they build a regional bloc independent of the FTAA. They have the right to do so, with or without the say so of George Bush. This might become a centrally important issue, should the US decide to intervene militarily to try and re-assert its authority in the region. But to recognize this assertion of sovereignty and self-determination, is not the same as confusing the innovative ALBA initiatives with the much more traditional trade bloc emerging under the rubric variously of MERCOSUR, the South American Community of Nations and Petrosur or Petroamérica.

Iconic Peruvian socialist and peasant leader, Hugo Blanco has a sense of this, and has put on the table an orientation which might emerge more prominently in the coming years. “In Venezuela people talk of ‘building ALBA from below.’” Now Blanco interpreted this in a particular way. When people in Venezuela talk about ALBA from below, “we understand from this that there will not only be dealings between governments, but that it will promote the sale of products directly by the workers themselves, as is the case with various agricultural products, with the output of the 120 factories in the hands of Argentine workers, and with our own cooperative.”[82] The cooperative Blanco is referring to is a peasant-controlled tea-producing cooperative. But Blanco’s point can be extended even further. Worker to worker, or worker to peasant links are ways of conceiving ALBA from below. More generally, the point has to be made that it makes a crucial difference – for ALBA as for all reforms – whether those reforms are “given” to the poor from above by a state, or won through a process of self-mobilization which builds the self-confidence and self-organization of the masses of poor and oppressed.

States can give reforms and improve peoples’ lives. But they can also take them away. And when those reforms come under attack – whether from internal opposition from capitalism or from external intervention by imperialism, states have time and again shown themselves to be, at best, very poor defenders of gains won in the past. At worst, they join in the attack, aligning state-capitalism with the interests of the multinationals. It is only when reforms are based on the self-activity of the masses, that there is created a firm foundation to defend those reforms when they come under attack, and to lay the basis for a new society where real power rests in the hands of the direct producers.

Blanco’s peasant-controlled tea cooperative is, ironically, based in Cuzco,[83] the same place where the 2004 meeting announced the formation of the South American Community of Nations. In the coming years, we will see a contest between these two Cuzco-based visions – ALBA from below, or state capitalism from above. Millions throughout the hemisphere have a tremendous stake in the outcome of that contest. We have seen state capitalism many times. While of course,

Venezuela, Brazil and the other countries of the region have a right to embark on such a development project, it does not represent another world. A state-capitalist world is the same world of class exploitation, environmental degradation, oppression and alienation that we know all too well. But we have rarely seen anything like “ALBA from below”. On that basis, a movement for another world might just be possible.

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## **Notes**

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Socialist Voice #103, June 11, 2006

## **Statements on “Anti-Terror” Arrests**

*The following statements, by the International Socialists and by the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War, were issued in response to the recent highly-publicized arrests of 17 Toronto-area men.*

### **Islam Is Not the Enemy War and Racism Are Not the Answers**

by *Socialist Worker* (newspaper of the International Socialists)

The Canadian media is on the rampage. “Face of a Terrorist?” screams the front page of the *Toronto Star*. “The Friendly Zealot” screams the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, followed the next day with “Storm, Seize, Behead”. Pages and pages and pages are devoted to the fact that 17 people, five too young to be identified, have been arrested on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks in Canada.

You would think we had never seen this before. But we have. August 14, 2003, Toronto police kicked in the doors of 19 young men from South Asia. The total arrested later rose to 22. At least one government official said that they had uncovered “an al-Qaeda sleeper cell”. The press was full of reports of plans to topple the CN Tower and blow up the Pickering nuclear reactor.

The CN Tower is still standing. The Pickering nuclear reactor is still functioning. All talk of “al-Qaeda in Toronto” has disappeared. No charges were ever laid. No one ever went to trial. No one was ever convicted. All the “evidence” turned out to be bogus.

All that happened was that most of the accused, immigrants from Pakistan and India, were deported — after spending months in detention — with their reputations in ruins, and their lives turned completely upside down. There was no official apology delivered. There was no huge front page in the *Toronto Star* or the *Globe and Mail* saying “Sorry, we were wrong.” The stain of Islamophobia remained long after the unfortunate victims of what was called “Project Thread” were forgotten.

We must demand that history not repeat itself. These men are innocent until proven guilty.

We should condemn the press for sensationalist coverage which is, in effect, convicting these men in advance of a trial. We get pious editorials saying that of course, they have the right to fair trial, while the front pages say “Zealot” and “Terrorist” with screaming headlines. This is irresponsible and the very stuff that makes a fair trial almost impossible.

And then there is the matter of the demands being put on the Islamic community to “account” for the “creation” of young terrorists.

First of all, we have no idea whether these 17 are terrorists are not — nothing has been proven.

Second, what does this have to do with the Islamic community?

Were young white accountants called to account for creating a culture of violence after Paul Bernardo was found guilty of a string of horrific rapes and murders?

Were angry young sexist men called to account after Marc Lepine murdered 14 women engineering students in Montreal?

Were white Christians who were members of the Republican Party and the National Rifle Association called to account after Timothy McVeigh murdered 167 in Oklahoma City?

The targeting of the Islamic community is racism, pure and simple.

Stephen Harper will use these arrests as an excuse to try and come out looking great during the upcoming mandatory five-year review of Canada's "anti-terror" laws.

He will also use them to try and bump up support for the war in Afghanistan — support that has been steadily declining as the body bags come home, and news of atrocities committed by NATO forces begins to surface. But the real source of terror is Canada following the lead of George Bush and engaging in wars abroad — wars which at the end of the day are not about democracy, but about oil and gas. The real terrorism is the practice of racist detentions, and the suspension of civil liberties. The real terrorism is assisting the US to deport Maher Arar to detention and torture abroad.

There is a way to end all this nonsense and bring us closer to a world of peace and human rights.

- **Remove the troops from Afghanistan.**
- **End all secret trials.**
- **Free the four Islamic men still detained on "security certificates"**

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### **Statement on Anti-Terror Arrests**

#### **by the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War**

The recent wave of "anti-terror" arrests in Toronto has sparked a national debate about the threat of terrorism in Canada and the issue of security. In response to this debate, the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War would like to put forward the following points:

1. All those arrested must be treated as innocent until proven guilty. This precept is the cornerstone of our justice system and, in order to guarantee a fair and open trial, must be consistently applied to all those now facing charges;
2. What has been reported in the press are *alleged* acts and not proven facts. Only a trial by the public courts system — and not the media — can determine the difference. All media has a responsibility to report on the case fairly and accurately and without resorting to sensationalism;
3. Members of government and other public officials should not publicly comment on the case in any way that undermines the precept of "innocent until proven guilty" or that compromises the integrity of a fair and open trial. So far both Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Minister of Public Safety Stockwell Day have already suggested that those charged are guilty;

4. The Muslim community and the Islamic faith should not in any way be held responsible for the *alleged* acts of individual suspects. Every effort should be made to ensure the safety and security of Muslims and to prevent any kind of backlash against the Muslim community. All acts motivated by Islamophobia and hate should be opposed and condemned;

5. Canadians should bear in mind that this recent wave of arrests is not the first. Two years ago, as many as twenty-six Muslim men were arrested in Toronto in a sweep called “Project Thread” that received widespread international attention and that, according to at least one government official, had uncovered “an Al-Qaeda sleeper cell” in Canada. This statement was proved to be false, not one of the men were ever formally charged (or convicted) of committing a crime, and most were deported from Canada. No effort was made to clear their names or restore their reputations.

Please circulate this statement in order to help defend civil liberties and to stand in solidarity with the Muslim community against any kind of backlash. It is critical that this recent wave of “anti-terror” arrests and the media coverage about it not be exploited to perpetuate divisions between Muslims and non-Muslims and that relationships of solidarity and support between communities be expanded and deepened. The arrests should also not be exploited in order to justify Canada’s deeply unpopular participation in the occupation of Afghanistan or the use of repressive measures that curtail civil liberties in Canada such as secret trials and security certificates.

The anti-war movement in Canada has an important role to play in defending civil liberties, opposing racism and Islamophobia and supporting the Muslim community. We hope that you will join us in this effort.

**Toronto Coalition to Stop the War**

TCSW is Toronto’s city-wide anti-war coalition, comprised of more than fifty labour, faith and community organisations, and a member of the Canadian Peace Alliance. [www.nowar.ca](http://www.nowar.ca) / [stophewar@sympatico.ca](mailto:stophewar@sympatico.ca) / 416-xxx-xxxx

Socialist Voice #104, June 14, 2006

## **The Toronto 'Anti-Terror' Arrests: An Attack on Muslims and Antiwar Opinion**

**by Ian Angus**

On June 2, a combined force of local, provincial and federal police arrested 15 young Muslim men, including five minors, in the Toronto area. Those 15, and two others who have been in jail since last August, are accused of plotting terrorist attacks on various targets in Ontario. If convicted, they could be sentenced to life in prison.

These arrests were conducted in the name of “stopping terrorism,” but a close look at the facts suggests that they were actually the opening salvo in an intense propaganda campaign to divide the Muslim community, build support for the federal government’s draconian “anti-terrorism” laws, and push back the considerable opposition in Canada to Ottawa’s war policy in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Middle East.

The arrests were carefully orchestrated to ensure that the stories concocted by police received maximum publicity. The arrests took place on a Friday evening. This meant the men could be held incommunicado through the weekend, giving the police maximum opportunity to get their story out.

Friendly journalists and politicians were briefed before the arrests took place. Details of the police allegations were made public at a press conference the following morning, before the accused and their lawyers received any information at all.

### **Trial by media**

All normal standards of decency or concern for accuracy were abandoned by most journalists in the following days. Most reports were based on a police-prepared eight-page “synopsis,” a document normally given only to defense lawyers. Prominent criminal lawyer Julian Falconer told CBC Radio that such synopses are “notoriously acts of fiction” that seldom bear any resemblance to the evidence eventually presented at trial. Despite that, newspapers across Canada reported every lurid accusation. Most devoted several pages a day to the “plot.”

No allegation was too nonsensical to get front-page treatment. The men were said to be planning to take over Parliament, hold MPs hostage, and behead politicians one at a time until Canada withdraws from Afghanistan. Other reported targets include the CBC, the Toronto Stock Exchange, and the Toronto offices of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). The *Globe and Mail* raised fears of a 9/11-style attack by reporting that the accused were taking flight training — in fact one of the men took one semester of an aircraft maintenance course that involves no flying at all.

The media coverage reeked of racism: article after article featured references to the arrested as “Canadian-born” (rather than simply “Canadian”); to “brown-skinned young men”; and to sinister goings-on in Muslim mosques.

Meanwhile, the 17 accused, five of whom are minors, were held in isolation cells with the lights on 24 hours a day, denied the right to consult lawyers in private, denied visits from their families. When they were taken to court, the police put on a show. Over 30 officers with machine guns surrounded the building while sharpshooters patrolled nearby rooftops. The accused, none of whom has been accused of committing a single violent act, were brought in wearing leg irons.

### **No evidence**

There is no reason to believe any part of the police story. Less than two years ago, Toronto Police arrested 19 young men from South Asia, and the press was filled with charges that they planned to blow up the CN Tower and the Pickering nuclear plant. The entire story was false: no charges were ever laid. Bear in mind also that these latest arrests in Toronto occurred just before police in the UK were forced to apologize for a heavily publicized raid on a London apartment that they wrongly claimed was a storage site for chemical weapons — a young Muslim man was shot and seriously injured during that attack.

But even if every word of the bizarre police synopsis is true, it’s clear that this was not a sophisticated terrorist cell plotting to rain devastation on our “pluralistic western society.” What the synopsis actually describes is a group of devout young Muslim men, angry at Canada’s increasingly active role in the international war against countries where Islam is the dominant religion, venting their frustration in wild online chat and “plots” that were mostly fantasy. They may have wanted to strike out, but they had no skills, no realistic plans, and no resources. As Toronto-area imam Ally Hindy told *Newsweek* magazine, “I just think these people were bullshitting.”

The police say they have been watching these young men for nearly two years: tapping their phones, reading their emails, interviewing friends and employers. Until now the RCMP and CSIS have claimed that their policy is to break up groups like this before anything actually happens. Such heavy-handed police interventions have long been standard procedure against political activity the cops regard as threatening — an RCMP/CSIS briefing paper presented to the new federal Cabinet in February bragged that they have carried out 12 such disruptions in the past two years. (*Globe and Mail*, June 7, 2006)

But this time the cops changed tactics. Someone, undoubtedly with Cabinet approval, decided that rather than simply intimidating the young dissidents into inactivity, they should arrange for an anti-terrorist propaganda coup.

So they orchestrated a sting, setting up the young men to buy fertilizer from an undercover cop, allegedly to build giant bombs. It’s not yet clear to what extent the cops used agents or provocateurs to promote the purchase. Entrapment is standard police procedure in this type of case, and there’s no reason to think that the RCMP and CSIS have clean hands now.

In any event, it's not illegal to buy fertilizer in Canada, so the police have fallen back on charges of "plotting" and "conspiring" — the usual resort of prosecutors when hard evidence is weak or non-existent.

These young men are being used as pawns to promote Ottawa's pro-war, anti-immigrant policies. The evidence against them is virtually non-existent; the media coverage is a blatant witchhunt; and the police propaganda campaign has so poisoned the atmosphere that they are unlikely to get a fair trial.

The weakness of the police case was demonstrated on June 12, when the prosecution sought (and a judge granted) a complete publication ban on court proceedings, over the objections of defense lawyers.

"After they've had 10 days with the media, feeding the media whatever they want to feed the media, denying us disclosure of any evidence and doing what they need to do to conduct a trial in this parking lot of this courthouse, they now have the audacity to request a blanket publication ban of all proceedings from today's date," said Rocco Galati, lawyer for one of the accused.

The cops were eager to get their unproven "synopsis" allegations out to the widest possible audience, but when it comes to court-tested evidence, well, that's different. It's hard not to conclude that the actual evidence is even less convincing than what we've seen so far.

### **Why now?**

The police could have moved against this small and poorly organized group at any time. The decision to move now was driven by the cops' political bosses, who wanted a dramatic event they could use to build support for the government's pro-war and anti-immigrant policies. Defense lawyer Galati told reporters that the government's goal is "a show trial for political ends" designed to influence the Supreme Court's review of the legality of security certificates under which five Muslim men have been held without trial for as long as five years.

He also said that the arrests and publicity aimed to build support for Cabinet's plan to renew the *Anti-Terrorism Act*, which eliminates important civil rights, including the right not to testify. That law, which was rushed through Parliament in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, will expire this year unless Parliament votes to extend it.

But the number one goal of the June 2 arrests and the subsequent propaganda campaign is to intimidate opponents of Ottawa's growing war in Afghanistan, where 2,200 Canadian troops are participating in the NATO occupation force.

On May 18, a motion to extend Canada's "mission" until 2009 passed in the House of Commons by only four votes, and antiwar sentiment has been growing across the country. The government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper is expanding Canada's partnership with Washington's imperial war drive, but it fears that growing domestic opposition will block its ambitions. The war is not going well in Afghanistan for the Canadian invaders, and large numbers of people at home are opposed to it. With these arrests, Canada's rulers are renewing the fraudulent claim

that the illegal invasion and occupation of Afghanistan is somehow connected to stopping terrorist attacks in Canada.

The anti-terrorist propaganda barrage has had a short-term impact on antiwar sentiment. In May, a Strategic Counsel poll found that 54% of Canadians opposed Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, while only 40% were in favour. Three days after the arrests, the same polling company found 48% in favour and only 44% opposed. That's a substantial shift — but 44% opposition is still very strong, and support for the war will certainly erode again as people realize the destructive effects of the war on both Afghanistan and Canadian society.

Opposition to the war is particularly strong among Muslim Canadians, most of whom correctly see Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan as part and parcel of Washington's war in the Middle East. The June 2 arrests and the subsequent propaganda campaign are part of a concerted effort by the government to isolate the Muslim community, to split that community itself by pressuring "moderate" Muslims to condemn "radicals and extremism" — and to block the developing alliances between Canadian Muslim organizations and antiwar activists, particularly in Toronto. The message is very clear: support the government, refrain from criticism, and keep your head down — or you might be next.

But the government's campaign of intimidation can be countered. Opponents of the war must defend the right of everyone in Canada to speak out against the war, against "security certificates," and against all attacks on civil rights. We must condemn every attack on immigrants and refugees, and ally ourselves unconditionally with the Muslim community in their fight against discrimination and religious or racial profiling by the police.

And we must build the antiwar movement, which opposes Ottawa's imperial ambitions in the Middle East. Canadians are dying in increasing numbers in Afghanistan, and working people at home are suffering as the government diverts money from education, health care and social programs into increased military spending. Ottawa's demagoguery about "supporting our troops" must be countered with an unequivocal demand that Canada end its participation in the occupation of Afghanistan now.

Socialist Voice #105, June 19, 2006

## **Bolivia's Democratic and Cultural Revolution – Not One Step Backwards!**

**By Evo Morales**

**Socialist Voice Introduction by Phil Cournoyer** *On May 31 a gathering of prominent Bolivian capitalist leaders in the city of Potosí adopted a common position of opposition to the measures of the government of President Evo Morales. The meeting included the leaders of seven provincial private-enterprise federations (Chuquisaca, Cochabamba, La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, Beni, and Pando) and the Executive Committee of the Bolivian Federation of Private Enterprises. Their meeting ended with a public declaration expressing “a high degree of concern” over the measures undertaken during the first five months of the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism) government. The statement denounced the government’s course as being an “ideological adventure contrary to the basic principles that regulate the world economy and the development of the people.”*

*The declaration charged that “during this time the institutional integrity of the main organisms of the state have been damaged and trampled underfoot. The capture of public powers and the damage to the independence of the judiciary, the Constitutional Tribunal, and state entities are actions that undermine democracy and the rule of law.”*

*The statement left no doubt that the main concern of Bolivian capitalist strategists is the mobilization of landless campesinos for land reform. Government land redistribution measures could lead to “a fratricidal clash between Bolivians,” they warned. “The land occupations taking place in the eastern and western parts of the country could lead to an unstoppable wave of attacks on private property not only of the big producers, but also of medium and small producers, and curtail agro-industrial development.”*

*Two days later Evo Morales responded with a powerful open letter, assuring Bolivians that the democratic and cultural revolution led by his government would not take even one step backwards. Morales chided the business leaders for having adopted the political position of the right-wing political alliance Podemos led by former president Jorge Tuto Quiroga, political heir of former dictator Hugo Banzer.*

*An article by Pablo Stefanoni in Green Left Weekly (June 14)[1] reports that Morales took on the landlords frontally in a speech the day before issuing his Open Letter. “They say that the peasants have taken over land, but the landowners, their parents, and grandparents have subjugated us for more than 500 years, and even today they continue to take over public lands”, Morales said. “Until now, we have been talking of public land, but the next step will be the large landowners who do not comply with their social and economic function. I am not afraid,” Bolivia’s president assured his people.*

*Stefanoni reports that on June 3 “Morales accompanied his words with action; he signed decrees envisaging the distribution of public land (around 2.5 million hectares) among communities and peasant unions as well as revoking the concessions on forest areas that had been transformed into the property of dealers by the previous government of Carlos Mesa.*

*“Morales explained to his followers that the agrarian reform of 1953 only distributed land, while the current ‘agrarian revolution’ is about ‘lands, markets, and modernization of farming.’”*

*Capitalist and right-wing politicians in Bolivia are also extremely distressed by the strong relations of cooperation and solidarity that the MAS government has established with Venezuela and Cuba. Evo Morales is not giving even an inch to their attacks on this front. On June 14 Morales led a ceremony in Vallegrande to commemorate the 78th birthday of Che Guevara at the site of his burial following his murder in the nearby village of La Higuera by the Bolivian army on October 9, 1967.*

*Morales was flanked by the ambassadors of Cuba and Venezuela, Rafael Dausa and Julio Montes. Prensa Latina reported that “Morales thanked the Cuban people and Commander Fidel Castro for the health cooperation given to Bolivia. He highlighted Operation Miracle, including six Cuban-equipped facilities to benefit poor Bolivians with free ophthalmology surgery carried out by Cuban doctors. Morales also welcomed the progress achieved in the campaign through which 120,000 illiterate Bolivians are learning to read and write based on the Cuban “Yo Si Puedo” method, thus contributing to increase the country’s education level.”*

*Below is an English-language translation of Evo Morales’s open letter, followed by the Prensa Latina report on the Vallegrande ceremony. The translation of the open letter is based on one that appeared in the Australian newspaper Green Left Weekly, but with editing and revisions by Socialist Voice.*

*The Spanish-language text of Morales’s open letter and the statement of the business federations can be found on the Rebellion website at: <http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=32579>*

## **Democratic and Cultural Revolution – Not One Step Backwards!**

### **By Evo Morales**

(June 2, 2006) Yesterday, Bolivians were able to read in the newspapers a declaration signed by the heads of private business federations of seven provinces of Bolivia. It is evident that we have in front of us a political manifesto that adopts the discourse of the *Podemos* party,[2] and makes a clear defense of an archaic, anti-national economic model defeated by the Bolivian people.

1. Calling the current process of change an “ideological adventure,” the signatory organizations hypocritically uphold a false nationalism in order to oppose the nationalization of the Bolivian economy and state being carried out by our government.

2. The declaration forgets that the economic policies of this government — which in four months has done more to benefit Bolivians than 20 years of neoliberalism — were supported with 54% of the votes; a result never before achieved by any democratic government [in Bolivia]. And, since that date, the popular government of the MAS [Movement Towards Socialism] has not departed one iota from the electoral program it proposed to Bolivians. That is why today, according to the polls, more than 80% of Bolivian men and women from the countryside and the cities express their approval of our performance.
3. They are trying to confuse the people, saying that we do not have an economic program. But in these four months we have been working on the reconstruction of a strong and dynamic public sector, on the construction of basic infrastructure oriented towards regional, social, and economic development, on the industrialization of our natural resources, and on the strengthening of indigenous and communitarian economies. That will also benefit patriotic and honest business owners who are not linked with those bought-off and anti-national business elites.
4. Why didn't these boss organizations speak out when Bolivia was leading all of the international records for corruption, when the state was a booty at the service of the most "cunning," when business success did not depend on enterprising will and productive capacity but rather on friendships with key figures of political power? Why is it that today 72% of employment is created by micro and small businesses and not by the leaders of organizations who won't accept that the party is over for business owners who fed off the public treasury, protected by political godfathers?
5. Pretending to defend institutionalism and democracy, these business elites are really defending institutions captured by transnational interests, and military figures who handed over strategic armament to a foreign power. Those who vouch for those who handed over the Bolivian anti-aircraft missiles and disarmed our armed forces are traitors to the homeland.[3] That is why they also defend foreign businesses that pretend to "invest" in the country, violating Bolivia's laws and constitution. For that same reason they reject the nationalization of hydrocarbons, which scores of poor Bolivian men and women died for.
6. They say Bolivia has become dependent on Cuba and Venezuela. When did these business organizations raise their voices against imperial ambassadors who acted as viceroys, undermining our sovereignty and trampling on the dignity of Bolivians? Today there is no subordination, but rather trade and cooperation agreements within the framework of national independence, without conditions as occurred before. This benefits the popular majorities who have been traditionally discriminated against and excluded.
7. They also mention that Bolivian soldiers sing the anthems of other countries, which is part of the protocol for visiting dignitaries from friendly nations. When have these same organizations ever protested against the complete subordination of our soldiers to orders

from those in uniforms of a foreign power? When did they raise their voices to oppose the entry of soldiers in order to massacre and humiliate indigenous peoples and peasants in the name of the fight against drug trafficking, terrorism and ‘zero coca’? The difference is that today external cooperation aims to save lives, not to mistreat our fellow compatriots.

8. They say Bolivia is isolated. But far from isolated, today the international community — for the first time in our history — see Bolivia as a country that commands respect, that has left behind being a no-man’s land in order to belong to all Bolivians who work, produce and are capable of participating in this process of rebirth of our homeland.
9. Our government works and will continue to work with patriotic, dignified and honest business owners who are committed to Bolivia.
10. The memories of the past that Bolivians decided to leave behind on December 18 [4] are too fresh for us to forget so easily the difference between those who defend the nation and those who have sold it out with impunity.

### **Bolivia: Morales Recalls Che Guevara**

**Vallegrande, Bolivia, Jun 14 (Prensa Latina)** The memory of Commander Ernesto Che Guevara, very much alive on the narrow streets of this Bolivian historic city, was recalled on Wednesday by President Evo Morales.

At a ceremony to inaugurate Cuban-donated medical equipment for a local hospital, Morales said he was also there to give a boost to the literacy campaign on the 78th birth anniversary of the Latin American revolutionary hero.

Ambassadors of Cuba and Venezuela, Rafael Dausa and Julio Montes, Cuba’s Education Minister Luis Ignacio Gomez, Bolivian Presidential Miniater Juan Ramon Quintana, and Presidential spokesman Alex Contreras co-presided over the ceremony with Morales.

Previously, Morales and his guests visited the monument in memory of Che and his comrades built around the grave where their remains stayed hidden until their retrieval and repatriation to Cuba in 1997.

They also visited other historic places, including the laundry of Senor de Malta Hospital, which has become a pilgrimage site, as it was the place Che’s body was shown after he was assassinated in the neighboring village of La Higuera, on Oct 9, 1967.

The hospital has been completely modernized with state-of-the-art equipment donated by Cuba, which also sent 25 highly qualified workers there.

Morales thanked the Cuban people and Commander Fidel Castro for the health cooperation given to Bolivia.

He highlighted Operation Miracle, including six Cuban-equipped facilities to benefit poor Bolivians with free ophthalmology surgery carried out by Cuban doctors.

Morales also welcomed the progress achieved in the campaign through which 120,000 illiterate Bolivians are learning to read and write based on the Cuban “Yo Si Puedo” method, thus contributing to increase the country’s education level.

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**Notes**

[1] Pablo Stefanoni, La Paz, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2006/671/671p19.htm>

[2] Podemos is the right wing political alliance led by former president Jorge Tuto Quiroga, political heir of former dictator Hugo Banzer.

[3] In October 2005 28 Chinese-made surface-to-air missiles were turned over to the U.S. during the administration of former interim president Eduardo Rodriguez. The US pressured the Bolivian government to surrender the missiles, fearing a victory of Evo Morales in the December elections.

[4] December 18, 2005, the day Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia with 54% support.

Socialist Voice #106, June 26, 2006

## **End Canada's Occupation of Afghanistan!**

**Call for action on October 28, 2006**

*This call for a pan-Canadian day of action, co-signed by the Canadian Peace Alliance, the Canadian Islamic Congress, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Montreal coalition Echéec a la Guerre, is being distributed and discussed at the World Peace Forum now taking place in Vancouver. -SV*

The Collectif Échéec à la guerre, Canadian Peace Alliance, the Canadian Labour Congress, and the Canadian Islamic Congress are jointly calling for a pan-Canadian day of protest this October 28th, 2006, to bring Canadian troops home from Afghanistan. On that day, people all across the country will unite to tell Stephen Harper that we are opposed to his wholehearted support for Canadian and U.S. militarism.

This October marks the fifth anniversary of the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and the people of that country are still suffering from the ravages of war. Reconstruction in the country is at a standstill and the needs of the Afghan people are not being met. The rule of the new Afghan State, made up largely of drug running warlords, will not realize the democratic aspirations of the people there. In fact, according to Human Rights Watch reports, the human rights record of those warlords in recent years has not been better than the Taliban.

We are told that the purpose of this war is to root out terrorism and protect our societies, yet the heavy-handed approach of a military occupation trying to impose a US-friendly government on the Afghan people will force more Afghans to become part of the resistance movement. It will also make our societies more — not less — likely to see terrorist attacks. No discussion on military tactics in the House of Commons will change that reality. Indeed, violence is increasing with more attacks on both coalition troops and on Afghan civilians.

While individual Canadian soldiers may have gone to Afghanistan with the best of intentions, they are operating under the auspices of a US-led state building project that cares little for the needs of the Afghan people. US and Canadian interests rest with the massive \$3.2 billion Trans Afghan Pipeline (TAP) project, which will bring oil from the Caspian region through southern Afghanistan (where Canada is stationed) and onto the ports of Pakistan. It has been no secret that the TAP has dominated US foreign policy towards Afghanistan for the last decade. Now Canadian oil and gas corporations have their own interests in the TAP.

Over the last decade, the role of the Canadian Armed Forces abroad has changed, and Canadian foreign policy has become a replica of the US empire-building rhetoric. The end result of this process is now plain to see with the role of our troops in Southern Afghanistan, with the enormous budget increases for war expenditures and “security,” with the Bush-style speeches of Stephen Harper, and with the fear campaigns around “homegrown terrorism” to foster support for those nefarious changes. It is this very course that will get young Canadian soldiers killed,

that will endanger our society and consume more and more of its resources for destruction and death in Afghanistan. We demand a freeze in defense and security budgets until an in-depth public discussion is held on those issues across Canada.

The mission in Afghanistan has already cost Canadians more than \$4 billion. That money could have been used to fund human needs in Canada or abroad. Instead it is being used to kill civilians in Afghanistan and advance the interests of corporations.

**On October 28th, stand up and be counted.  
Canadian Troops Out of Afghanistan Now!**

Socialist Voice #107, June 26, 2006

## **Québec Solidaire: Betting on Unity**

*New Quebec Left Party Faces Great Challenges and Opportunities*

**By Benoit Renaud**

*Benoit Renaud is a member of Québec Solidaire and the International Socialists, and an editor of Résistance. The following article is reprinted and adapted with permission from À babord, a bimonthly Quebec magazine published by “militants, independent journalists, teachers, students and rebels of all kinds and all origins” that is generally sympathetic to Québec Solidaire.*

The launching of Québec Solidaire, a new party bringing together the Union des Forces Progressistes (UFP) and Option Citoyenne, has produced a minimal organizational structure and a political profile which has been left deliberately vague. Uniting the 4,000 members of the two groups around a very general statement of principles involves taking a calculated risk. Only through practice, during the coming years, will we learn whether the bet has been won.

Québec Solidaire (QS) is best defined in terms of the political trajectories that converged in its foundation in February 2006.

The new party is the product, first of all, of more than 10 years of mass struggle against neo-liberalism as imposed by the Parti Québécois/Liberal Party duo. The thousand persons gathered at the University of Montreal founding convention could see their common history in these mobilizations, ranging from the “Bread and Roses” women’s march (1995) to the union campaigns against the Charest government, the illegal nurses’ strike of 1999, to the massive student strike last year. The zero-deficit policy of the Bouchard PQ government, adopted in 1996, and its refusal to respond to the World March of Women in 2000 contributed to breaking what remained of the PQ’s links to a large part of its trade-union and mass base.

QS also results from the new international political context shaped by the Zapatista uprising in Mexico, the Seattle demonstrations in 1999, and the anti-war movement since September 11, 2001. Those present at its founding convention could also identify with the campaign against the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the mass demonstrations at the Summit of the Americas, the movement against the Iraq war, and in the ambitious but vague movement called “altermondialisme,” the struggle for a new world based on social justice.

This is the most successful effort in Quebec’s history to establish a mass left-wing party. To get this far, it was necessary to fight the ideology that had fastened working people to the PQ’s hegemony: namely the idea that sovereignty supporters must be united whatever the price – or, more specifically, at the price of the left’s self-effacement.

QS already has more members than the right-wing ADQ, which has five members in Québec’s National Assembly. The UFP was already the third-largest party in some regions, including

Montreal. We can anticipate rapid growth in coming months and good results in the next general elections. At last, the left has a real party.

However, we should note that the process that brought about this fusion, while democratic in a formal sense, fell short of the agreed concept of a different type of politics. During negotiations, members were asked to offer opinions, not to make decisions. This process aroused much frustration and produced a document—the statement of principles—that is essentially a lowest common denominator.

This approach was carried forward in the structure of the Political Commission, a sort of committee of experts appointed by the National Coordinating Committee, which is to lead in formulating a party platform.

The very idea of bringing a thousand people together in a great unity celebration, rather than delegations chosen by local and regional groups, did not encourage discussion and debate in the regions or at the congress. Not much was left to do but to accept what had been previously negotiated.

Nonetheless, the structures established by the provisional statutes will enable the local and regional bodies to play a major role in the coming debates on the platform and in preparing the first general election campaign. It is local and regional delegates who will vote at National Council meetings and at the orientation congress planned for the end of November.

What will be at issue in this discussion? As the *Manifeste pour un Québec solidaire* [1] shows, the absence of a mass social-democratic tradition in Quebec endows this new left with an excessively optimistic view of what can be achieved within capitalism. The NDP expresses an aged social democracy whose reformism has become pessimistic, almost devoid of reforms. The Manifesto of the *solidaires*, by contrast, expresses an enthusiastic and almost naïve reformism, with a political economy that verges on left populism.

The notion that “another capitalism is possible” must be subjected to constructive but rigorous criticism. We need political education on the capitalist system and the history of the different international left movements, as well as opportunities to debate broad strategic choices. How will the values expressed in the Statement of Principles be realized? Is it enough to elect members of parliament? What is the role of the social movements, and how should the party relate to them?

The new party’s relationship to the various components of the trade-union movement remains undefined. Given the bureaucratic and conservative role of the union apparatus in the NDP and similar political formations, its support is possibly more to be feared than desired. On the other hand, the hundreds of thousands of organized workers are a natural base for a left formation and any fight against the bosses and their governments.

It appears that the top of Québec’s union officialdom is determined, for now, to maintain its strategic alliance with the PQ. This is also reflected in the activity of SPQ-Libre, a left formation within the PQ. SPQ-Libre responded to the formation of Québec Solidaire by advocating a broad

coalition for sovereignty, including possible sharing of constituencies in 2007. But if the PQ were to accept that it no longer is this broad coalition, how could it maintain its popular base? Not surprisingly, the PQ left lost this debate at the first opportunity, and it is unlikely to resurface.

The new party will also be called on to address the type of democracy that it wishes within its ranks. Speaking to the media outside the QS congress, Amir Khadir and François Saillant, former leaders of the UFP and OC, both said that the party would elect a leader before the next elections, and that they would be supporting Françoise David for this position. But the position does not exist! The UFP had created a collective leadership to avoid a leadership cult, to reflect the notion of “doing politics differently”. It would be a shame if QS took a step backward in this regard.

Of course media pressure and the nature of the British parliamentary system push in this direction. But what does the promise of a different breed of politics, of participatory democracy, mean if we give way on this question, at a time when the party is far from taking power—and when the concession is made publicly before any membership discussion?

It would also be useful to revisit the question of the rights of political tendencies within the party. The compromise reached in pre-fusion negotiations was to allow “collectives,” which have the right only to exist and to set up literature tables at national gatherings. At the founding convention, an amendment that would have allowed collectives to participate in meetings of the National Council and Conventions with the right to speak and move motions but not to vote was adopted by at least three workshops. A provision of this nature would enable the different political currents to find expression in national bodies and promote a pluralist political culture. In this way, unity becomes not a formula for conformity but the result of open debates between different strategies and political traditions, with respect for differences.

Finally, we cannot postpone indefinitely the “strategic voting” debate that has undermined the English Canadian left for many years. In Quebec it takes the form of “anyone but Charest”, or the sacrosanct unity of sovereignty supporters behind or within the PQ. What kind of campaign will we wage in 2007? Will we go all out to present a principled left alternative in as many constituencies as possible? Will we try to elect candidates by any means? Will we give way before the vitriolic campaign of the PQ leaders and house intellectuals, who will be quick to attack us with all the demagoguery they can muster?

Ultimately, the new party’s course depends on the involvement of its present and future members and on the debates they conduct in the coming years. Given that this period brought out 80,000 in Quebec City in April 2001 to oppose the FTAA, 200,000 in Montreal on February 15, 2003, to oppose the Iraq war, and the largest student strike of our history, we can allow ourselves some degree of optimism as to the prospects opened by the convergence of thousands of activists in Québec Solidaire.

**Notes**

[1] The [Manifesto](#) was published November 1, 2005, under the signatures of a wide range of personalities including some PQ and Bloc Québécois parliamentarians, in response to the publication in October of a right-wing manifesto *Pour un Québec lucide* (For a clear-eyed vision of Quebec), by former PQ premier Bouchard along with prominent *péquistes* and Liberals. The manifesto of the “solidaires” was authored by leaders of the UFP and Option citoyenne, which later merged to form Québec solidaire. See *Socialist Voice* – “PQ’s Rightward Shift Opens Space for New Left Party in Quebec.” —SV

Socialist Voice #108, June 26, 2006

## **Moral Punishment for the Arrogance of an Empire**

**By Felipe Pérez Roque**

**The absence of the United States on the Human Rights Council is moral punishment for the arrogance of an empire**

*Statement by **Felipe Pérez Roque**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, at the High-Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council*

Geneva, 20 June 2006

Excellencies:

Today is a particularly symbolic day. Cuba is a founding member of the Human Rights Council and the United States is not. Cuba was elected with the overwhelming support of 135 countries; more than two-thirds of the United Nations General Assembly, while the United States did not even dares to run as a candidate. Cuba relied on the secret vote for the same reasons that the United States was afraid of it.

Cuba's election epitomizes the victory of principles and truth; it stands as recognition of the value of our resilience. The absence of the United States is the defeat of lies; it is the moral punishment for the haughtiness of an empire.

The election entailed a demanding assessment. Each one got what they deserved. Cuba was rewarded and the United States was punished. Each one had its history and the voting countries were well aware of it.

The African countries recalled that over 2,000 Cuban fighters had shed their generous blood in the struggle against the outrageous Apartheid regime, which the United States supported and furnished with weapons, even nuclear ones.

The election for Cuba came at a moment in which nearly 30,000 Cuban doctors were saving lives and alleviating the pain in 70 countries, while the United States reached that stage with 150,000 invading soldiers, sent to kill and die in an unjust and illegal war.

The election for Cuba came with more than 300,000 patients from 26 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean who were recovering their eyesight thanks to the cost-free surgeries performed by Cuban eye specialists. It came for the United States with over 100,000 civilians murdered and 2,500 American youths dead in a war concocted to steal a country's oil and give away sumptuous contracts to a group of cronies of the President of the world's sole superpower.

The election for Cuba came with more than 25,000 youths from 120 Third World countries studying in its universities and colleges free of charge. It came for the United States with a concentration camp in Guantánamo, where prisoners are subjected to torture and where the

official statement of the prison wardens was that the suicide of three human beings “is not an act of despair but an act of war and propaganda.”

The election for Cuba came with its airplanes carrying Cuban medical doctors and field hospitals to places where there had been natural disasters or epidemics. It came for the United States with its aircraft secretly carrying drugged and handcuffed prisoners from one jail to another.

The election for Cuba came with its proclamation of the prevalence of lawfulness over force, defending the United Nations Charter, demanding and fighting for a better world. It came for the United States with its proclamation of “if you are not on our side, you are against us.”

The election for Cuba came with its proposal of setting aside the trillion US dollars annually spent on weapons to fight off the yearly death of preventable causes of 11 million children under the age of five years and 600,000 poor women at childbirth. In the meantime, it came for the United States with its proclamation of its right to bomb and “pre-emptively” wipe out what it scornfully called “any dark corners of the world” if its designs were not obeyed. That included the city of The Hague, if there were any attempts to prosecute an American soldier at the International Criminal Court.

While Cuba defended the rights of the Palestinian people, the United States was the main pillar behind Israel’s crimes and atrocities.

While under the striking force of Hurricane Katrina the US Government abandoned hundreds of thousands of people to their luck, most of them black and poor, Cuba immediately offered to send 1,100 doctors, who could have saved lives and alleviated their suffering.

I could go on and on listing reasons until tomorrow. I just want to add that it is the Government of the United States, not its people, which does not have a seat today as a member of the Council. The American people will be represented in the others, including Cuba’s seat. Our delegation will also speak out for the rights of the American people and, particularly, for the rights of its most discriminated and excluded sectors.

Now, the truth is that the United States was not alone in its gross and desperate schemes and pressures to prevent Cuba’s election. A handful of its allies followed them to the very end. The usual posse: beneficiaries of the unjust and exclusion-oriented world order, most of them former colonial metropolises, which have not yet paid off their historical debt to their once-colonies.

Cuba is perfectly aware, even to its barest details, of the secret agreement negotiated in Brussels through which the European Union undertook not to vote for Cuba and then work closely with the United States against our candidature. But they failed famously. It turned out that Cuba was elected without its support and its uncomfortable ally, which they need as a policeman to guarantee its privileges and squandering opulence, could not even run as a candidate.

The corridors and halls of this building are now reverberating with repeated calls for “a fresh start” and “breathing fresh air into the new Council” – precisely by those who are responsible for the manipulation, hypocrisy and selectivity that caused the Commission on Human Rights to run

aground. It is fitting to point out that a fresh start cannot be built on the oblivion of what has been happening or the simulation that some sugar-coated rhetoric is a problem-solver. What we need are deeds and not words.

If there is any truth to the statements by the spokespersons of the European Union and we are actually faced with a *mea culpa*, then we are still awaiting their rectification. Not because of Cuba. Not because they colluded with the United States to try to prevent our election. Not because they have never been able to have an ethical and independent policy towards Cuba.

We are awaiting a rectification to the attitude of the European Union, which last year prevented the Commission on Human Rights from adopting an investigation into the massive, flagrant and systematic human rights violations at Guantánamo Naval Base.

A rectification to the silent complicity with which they allowed hundreds of secret CIA flights carrying kidnapped people and the establishment of clandestine prisons right on European soil, where prisoners are tortured and harassed. So far, the European Union has hypocritically hindered the investigation and the clarification of these events.

The European Union has not mustered the courage to serve exemplary sanctions on the miserable manifestations of lack of respect for other religions and customs.

The European Union was an accomplice to the United States in turning the former Commission into some sort of Inquisition Tribunal against the countries of the South. We just hope that it will not happen again now.

The European Union has not even acknowledged its historical debt to the nearly 100 countries – currently independent nations after years of struggle and sacrifice – which were its pillaged colonies when, fifty-seven years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, which paradoxically stated that: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Excellencies:

This session can usher in a new stage in the struggle to create a real system for the promotion and protection of all human rights for all the inhabitants on the planet, and not just for the rich and privileged. A radical change will be required to that end; a real revolution in the concepts and methods that weighed down the defunct Commission.

Cuba does not indulge in wishful thinking about the real willingness of the developed countries – allies of the United States – to take that significant and historical step. However, it will give them the benefit of the doubt. It will wait and watch them.

Cuba can be counted upon if we work towards fulfilling the promises that have been trumpeted. If the past repeats itself and the Council becomes a battlefield again, from now on Cuba can be counted upon to turn, one more time, into a fighter in the trenches of ideas of the Third World.

Cuba cannot be counted upon to turn the Council into an exclusive tribunal against the underdeveloped countries and ensure the impunity of those in the North. Nor can it be relied upon to use the Council's suspension clause against rebellious countries or to continue using, in a politicized and selective fashion, the country resolutions to punish those that do not bow their head.

Cuba cannot be counted upon to use the new universal periodical review mechanism as an instrument of new pressures and media campaigns.

Nor can Cuba be counted upon to defend lies and act hypocritically.

Cuba can be counted upon to fight for truth and transparency, to defend the right to independence, to self-determination, to social justice, to equality. And also to defend the right to food, to education, to health, to dignity, the right to a dignified life.

Cuba can be counted upon to defend real democracy, true participation and the real enjoyment of all human rights.

Cuba's cooperation cannot be counted upon to assist the spurious mandate of any envoy, representative or rapporteur imposed through force and blackmail. Cuba can be counted upon to cooperate, on an equal footing, with the Council and its non-selective mechanisms.

Cuba's cooperation cannot be counted upon to make silence and fail to speak out against the ruthless economic blockade that we have endured for over four decades, nor can it be relied upon not to demand the return to our Homeland of five pure and courageous Cuban youths that were fighting terrorism and are currently imprisoned in US jails unjustly and illegally.

Cuba's cooperation cannot be counted upon to relinquish a single principle. Cuba will always be counted upon to uphold the noble ideal of building a better world for all.

Finally, on behalf of the Cuban people, who dream, build and defend their Revolution back in our Homeland, I would like to extend a special gratitude to our Third World brothers and sisters for their decisive support for Cuba's election as a member of the Human Rights Council – and I hereby reiterate that the Cubans will never betray the trust that you have placed in us.

For those who support Cuba's struggle for its rights, which is also the struggle for the rights of all the nations in the Third World and the progressive and democratic forces in the First World, we have a message: Until victory onwards!

For those who attack Cuba and for their accomplices, we have another message: Homeland or Death!

We shall overcome!

Socialist Voice #109, June 30, 2006

## **Chavez, Cuba, CAIA: Stop Israel's Assault on Gaza Now!**

*Statements issued June 29 and June 30 by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid*

### **Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez Condemns Israeli Aggression Against Palestinian People**

*The following statement on Israeli aggression against the people of Palestine was issued by the Press Office of the Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez Frías on June 29. The translation is by Socialist Voice. The original can be found at:*

*<http://www.minci.gov.ve/noticiasnuev.asp?numn=10463>.*

*Prensa Latina reported on June 30 that Bolivia's foreign minister, David Choquehuanca, has also made a statement condemning the Israeli aggression.*

The president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, condemned in the name of the Venezuelan people the most recent aggression that Israeli troops have waged against Palestine, as well as the violation of the airspace of Syria.

He made his assertion this Thursday during an act celebrating the promotion of officers and sub-officers of the Presidential Honor Guard Regiment. He said that Israel must respect the Palestinian people, "a people who have struggled for years for peace and independence. We send our solidarity to Palestine's president and people."

The Israeli army took over the south of the Gaza Strip and in the early morning dozens of tanks advanced from the north. The Israeli attack included the arrest of ten ministers, 20 parliamentarians, and members of the Palestine resistance.

"They have been using the entire military power accumulated by the State of Israel with support from US imperialism to bomb, penetrate, and invade Palestinian territory in defiance of UN resolutions and world peace. Also, in defiance of the United Nations, they have violated the airspace of the Arab Republic of Syria with overflights of the residence of the Syrian president, using the excuse that Syria protects terrorists. Nothing, absolutely nothing can justify to anyone in this world the transgression of the sovereignty of states and of the liberty of peoples," the Venezuelan president said.

"That's why and herein lies the importance of the battle we have been waging, our battle that we know has taken on or has extended itself into the world arena; our struggle is for peace, our struggle is for a world in equilibrium, as Bolívar said."

**Venezuela determined to enter the UN Security Council**

All this explains, in the words of President Chávez, the determination of the United States government to block Venezuela from being chosen next October as a member of the Security Council of the United Nations.

“Of course, the United States does not like it when any country or person raises their voice against imperialist outrages. We have raised our voice against the imperialist outrages of the United States and we will keep on raising our voice because we’ve had enough with outrages in this world (...) we want peace and we want respect.”

President Chávez said Venezuela’s nomination to the post is a challenge for the Bolivarian government, one that is accepted nobly. He extended thanks for support given by the governments of Brazil and Argentina because they recognize that Caracas defends the voices of the weakest people in the world.

He is confident that one by one more governments will come to support this proposal despite imperial pressure to block Venezuela’s entry as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

US spokespeople are already pressuring other governments to try to stop Venezuela’s election as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. “The United States says that Venezuela will not make it to the Security Council, and we say: Venezuela is going to the Security Council, we accept the challenge and take the on the battle worldwide, we say this openly.”

He commented with satisfaction on the results of a study carried out by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. It shows that the people of the United States and Venezuela are the ones who feel most pride in their countries. Fair play, political influence, social security, democracy, the military, and history were some of the factors appraised in the study.

The head of the Venezuelan state affirmed that this result shows that with each passing day the women and men of this nation are more proud of having been born in this homeland.

### **Cuba Condemns Israeli Military Aggression in the Gaza Strip Statement From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

**Havana, June 29, 2006** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, has learnt with great concern of Israel’s large-scale military operation that began in the Gaza Strip in the early hours of June 28, 2006 with the mobilization of around 5,000 soldiers, hundreds of tanks and other military hardware, during which it attacked the principal electricity station in the area, leaving half of the territory without electricity, indiscriminately bombarded several bridges connecting different parts of the Strip, reoccupied important southern portions of Palestinian territory, and detained many high-ranking figures from the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Israel has used the capture of an Israeli soldier by the Palestinian occupation resistance as an excuse to launch its barbaric aggression, ignoring the fact that the Israeli army has killed 52 Palestinians just in the current month of June, according to recognized international organizations.

This inhumane and criminal aggression took place just when an agreement had been reached among the Palestinian political forces, which is contributing to the renewal of peace talks between the Palestinians and Israelis, in line with the relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.

At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba rejects the violation of the Arab Republic of Syria's airspace by Israeli military aircraft which, together with the barbaric actions in the Gaza Strip, once again exposes the Middle East to a dangerous escalation of violence that is putting international peace and security at risk.

As in the past, Israel is acting with the arrogance and impunity afforded it both by U.S. economic and military support and its permanent veto on the UN Security Council.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba wishes to express its most vigorous condemnation of the barbaric Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip and calls on the international community and peace-loving forces to mobilize in demand of the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip; a cession of Israeli state terrorism; and respect for the inalienable human rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of an independent, sovereign state with its capital in East Jerusalem, the return of refugees, and the unconditional return of all Arab territories occupied in June 1967, as the only way of reaching a just and lasting peace for all the people of that convulsive region.

### **Israeli Military Aggression Highlights Apartheid Reality**

#### **Canadian Government Complicit in Policy of Starvation and Sanctions Targeting the Palestinian People**

*This statement was issued on June 30 by the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA), in support of a vigil at the Israeli Consulate in Toronto, co-sponsored by the Coalition, the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation, and the Coalition for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel.*

The Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA) condemns in the strongest possible terms the latest Israeli military assaults on Palestinian population centers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Since Wednesday morning Israeli jets have bombarded positions throughout the Gaza Strip and repeatedly violated Syrian airspace through aggressive aerial maneuvers.

Israeli tanks have taken up positions across the region to buttress military assaults on communities and neighborhoods in Rafah, Khan Younis, Gaza City, Ramallah, Jenin, Nablus and Hebron. Massive Israeli shelling of self-proclaimed "no-go areas" in the Gaza Strip has

resumed. These operations are being used to underpin a targeted campaign of mass arrests, kidnappings and arbitrary detentions of elected Palestinian officials, including a third of the Palestinian cabinet.

Of particular concern to CAIA is the targeting of civilian infrastructure, including the destruction of electrical generating infrastructure for over half of Gaza, attacks on bridges, roads and the aerial bombardment of Gaza's Islamic University. Furthermore, the use of elected officials as hostages by the Israeli government clearly demonstrates Israel's refusal to abandon state-terrorism. The latest arrests clearly expose the political fiction of Palestinian "self-determination" in the Oslo-created Bantustans.

"Operation Summer Rains" also highlights the real purposes of last-August's "Gaza pullout", namely to entrench Israeli apartheid throughout Palestine and to give the Israeli military free reign to pursue more aggressive policies of collective punishment in Gaza. This latest incursion is in fact the logical culmination of a coordinated policy of starvation, sanctions, siege, indiscriminate shelling, detentions, extrajudicial executions, targeting of civilians, etc. that has been implemented with increased vigour since the election of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections.

This vindictive Israeli policy is designed to punish the Palestinian people for decisively rejecting Israeli Apartheid through the election of Hamas. The policy was crudely defined by Dov Weisglass, a principal adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, during an official meeting in February 2006: "It's like a meeting with a dietitian. We need to make the Palestinians lose weight, but not to starve to death." In fact, this policy of starvation and sanctions has been tragically successful in worsening the conditions of life for the majority of Palestinians with the active acquiescence of significant portions of the "international community".

According to UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories John Dugard: "In effect the Palestinian people have been subjected to economic sanctions [by the international community], the first time that an occupied people have been so treated," stating that this was, "possibly the most rigorous form of international sanctions imposed in modern times."

Dugard cited Israel's withholding of \$50-\$60 million in monthly tax revenues, and funding cuts by Canada, the USA and the EU, as contributing to the crisis. As a result, some 70% of Palestinian households are now living in a "state of poverty" as the PA cannot pay salaries to some

140,000 employees who support roughly a third of the Palestinian population. Furthermore, the funding cut has also hit the most vulnerable sectors of the population given that the PA runs 70% of schools and 60% of health services in the occupied territories.

### **Canada's Role**

While Canadian funds to the PA have dried up, the Canadian state continues to enjoy cordial relations with the Israeli Apartheid regime. In fact, most analysts that follow relations between the two states predict that

2006 will set new records in bilateral trade and foreign-direct investment between the two economies. This economic boom is coupled by increasing Canadian diplomatic support for Israel's brutal policy of starvation and state-terror. Also Canada's Free Trade agreement with Israel sends a clear message of support for all the human rights abuses that Israel has and continues to commit in the region.

Canada was the first government after Israel to fully cut relations with the PA in late March 2006 and it currently plans on voting against or abstaining on a number of UN resolutions critical of Israeli policy in the region. The Canadian government therefore holds a particular responsibility for the atrocious deterioration of the human-rights situation throughout Palestine.

CAIA calls on allies and supporters to take a few minutes to respond to the action alerts below. It is becoming increasingly clear that the international community is fully complicit in the current wave of Israeli military assaults, as governments have stood by in recent weeks and watched the repeated massacre of Palestinian civilians, including a significant number of children, without moving a finger. It is clear, now more than ever, that only massive action against Israeli apartheid through the implementation of a clear boycott, sanctions and divestment strategy at the grassroots level will force our governments to listen. CUPE Ontario and the Toronto Conference of the United Church of Canada have shown great courage and leadership in their adoption of resolutions to boycott Israeli apartheid; it remains for other institutions and individual Canadians to implement, extend and defend these actions.

*Amandhla Intifada!*

*Amandhla Al-Awda!*