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The FSLN Victory: A National and Continental Defeat for Imperialism

Introduction: The following document represents the views of a group in Nicaragua engaged in a struggle to reclaim the heritage of the 1979 revolution and the anti-imperialist perspective of the original founders of the FSLN.

Dr. Julio Briceño Davila, a spokesperson for the group, says that "given the new world situation, particularly in Latin America and in Nicaragua, we are probing the possibilities of constituting a left force to help promote and deepen the changes proposed in the FSLN electoral campaign."

The group was formed when the FSLN was defeated in 1990. Its members had a common background in the old Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN-Marxist-Leninist), which they left in 1979 to join the FSLN.

For a fuller discussion of the Nicaraguan elections, see "Nicaragua Today," by Phil Cournoyer, in Socialist Voice 134 and Socialist Voice 135.

Managua, November 9, 2006. Given the collapse of 16 years of neoliberal governments and the electoral victory of the FSLN through the "United Nicaragua Triumphs" Alliance, the undersigned authors, representing an historic contingent of social fighters, believe we have a duty to put forward our political-ideological position before the national and international public.

Among our criteria we want to emphasize the following points:

1. The people of Nicaragua gave a vote of confidence to the FSLN and the candidacy of Comandante Daniel Ortega Saavedra after 16 years of being submerged into a misery never before seen in our history. Over those years the gap between rich and poor became greater and

greater. We saw the arrival of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's sellout presidency, followed by the corrupt interval of Arnoldo Alemán, and then the anti-national and antipopular austerity regime of [outgoing president] Enrique Bolaños Geyer.

2. A large section of the Nicaraguan people scorned other options and gave their vote to the only force capable of confronting the traditional corrupt and sellout oligarchy. They voted for the FSLN, a party that despite all the limitations that could be mentioned, achieved many social benefits for the population during its period of government from 1979 to 1990. This party has recently promoted excellent social policies through its municipal administrations – among which stand out the literacy campaign, Operation “Milagro” [an international effort led by Cuba and Venezuela to restore sight to persons with visual impairments], and other alternative programs that benefited farmers, the cooperative movement, children, and women.

3. The election result not only constituted a defeat for the traditional sellout oligarchy, but also for the campaign of fear generated and sustained by millions of dollars from the United States. Few elections in the world were as clean and as observed by various international organizations. At the same time, never before in history had we seen such a vulgar and barefaced Yankee intervention into the internal affairs of another country, a conduct condemned even by the observers from the European Union and the OAS.

4. Despite those dirty campaigns, recognition of the FSLN electoral success by governments and peoples was not long in coming. Revolutionary and progressive governments from Cuba to the southern cone openly expressed their joy for this new victory of the Latin American peoples.

5. The axis of evil led by Washington and its allies, who impose themselves on the peoples through pressure and wars of plunder (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine are the most recent examples), has suffered crushing defeats, both internally and externally, defeats that have international repercussions.

Today, November 8 – the day on which we wrote this statement – brought news that for the fifth consecutive year the UN General Assembly ratified the demand for an end to the economic, commercial, and financial blockade of Cuba, and with a record 183 votes in favor. On top of this comes the singular defeat of Bush and his gang in the U.S. congressional elections. This makes for a triple defeat for imperialism and their henchmen in just one week.

6. In this epoch of a unipolar world and of a revolutionary rise in Latin America, the situation has become complex and confused in its economic, political, ideological, social, and cultural spheres. All the more is this a time when we must apply a dialectical conception of history.

A majority of the population, including ourselves, are against the pact that took place [between the FSLN and] the most corrupt sector of the local right (PLC). One of its consequences was that the left vote was divided. More importantly, the antipact banner led a good part of the popular electorate to give their votes to the emergent party of the traditional oligarchy (ALN), the candidate of the State Department. It ended up in an advantageous second place.

The FSLN must break from these obstructions and head up a real struggle against corruption. Its pact should be with the people, with patriotic and progressive social forces. All this should be channeled to recover the prestige and social base it had in the period of the revolution.

7. In order to achieve transparency, governability, and coherence, qualified people should be placed in the administration and public positions, people known not just for their honesty and reliability, but also for their capacity. The FSLN must get rid of old scars from the pernicious maneuvering of the 1980s that did so much damage to such strategic social movements as the labor unions. FSLN leaders and cadres also must overcome petty sectarianism by making approaches to and establishing agreements with personalities, intellectuals, and the many men and women on the Nicaraguan left who have never given up. That would help strengthen progressive tendencies in society and take away the initiative from the most conservative ideological-political tendencies. Let's recall what happened to the government of Salvador Allende. All of this should bring about an authentic popular unity.

This is a unique historic opportunity for the FSLN as well as the Nicaraguan people – it's now or never. If not seized, this victory could turn into a strategic defeat.

The new government led by Comandante Daniel Ortega Saavedra, once it takes power next January 10, must keep in mind that U.S. imperialism always has a card hidden up its sleeve. History is replete with examples of that.

8. In these circumstances the FSLN needs to organize itself as a party or movement capable of imparting revolutionary education to workers of town and country, to young men and women, and to all citizens so as to build, if not a vanguard, a sufficiently solid alternative organization with a truly humanist, anticapitalist ideology.

Without that kind of organization the future of the FSLN, the power conquered with such tenacity, will become uncertain; the movement will be left adrift.

9. The FSLN must change its conception of the country's development and break from the oligarchic schema of "commercial opening, foreign investment, external aid and loans." That is the recipe that belongs to neoliberal governments. An internal market must be constructed with a prospect for regional expansion. Foreign investment must be carried out in relationship to this market and placed under the control of national policies that subordinated it to national development interests. It should guarantee technology transfer and qualification of human resources. Social and economic development cannot be subordinated to conditions imposed by international loan makers. We need to confront them with a vision of a national project.

10. Finally, this historic contingent of social fighters commit themselves to support the new government as long as it complies with its mandate and the confidence given it by the people through the ballot box.

The support of the Nicaraguan people for the new government does not signify a blank check for the FSLN and Daniel Ortega, but rather a vote of confidence after long years of hopelessness and deceit on the part of neoliberal governments.

Dr. Julio Briceño Dávila, Lombardo Aburto Cornejo, Róger Callejas Moreira , Rafael Casanova Fuertes, Gustavo A. Cornejo Alvarado

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A 'Québécois Nation'? Harper Fuels an Important Debate

By Richard Fidler

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The House of Commons voted on November 27 to support a Tory government motion that “the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada.” What does it mean? And why now?

The second question is easier to answer. The motion was triggered by an unexpected turn of events. Michael Ignatieff, in his quest for the Liberal leadership this fall, ignited a firestorm of protest within his party when he suggested that Quebec should be recognized as a “nation” in the Constitution. A similar proposal was endorsed by the federal party’s Quebec wing. It was promptly denounced by the other candidates and widely condemned as a “gaffe” in the English-Canadian media.

Fellow Liberal leadership contender Bob Rae voiced the widespread unease in ruling circles: “I’m not somebody who is going to set this country on a constitutional adventure, whose consequences and whose outcome I’m not certain of,” Rae said.

Rae was an architect of the ill-fated Charlottetown Accord, forged by the provincial premiers after the defeat of the Meech Lake Accord in the early 1990s. Neither of these proposed constitutional arrangements recognized Quebec as a nation. But Meech died in the face of English-Canadian opposition to a clause simply identifying Quebec as a “distinct society”. Charlottetown was defeated in a pan-Canadian referendum in which Quebec voters rejected it because it failed to recognize the province’s national specificity, while voters in the rest of Canada (ROC) rejected it because they thought it did. Three years later, Quebec came within a hair’s breadth of voting for sovereignty.

Since then, no federal politician of any stature has dared broach the issue of reforming the Constitution to accommodate Quebec concerns.

Now there was an opening. The Bloc Québécois, seeing an opportunity to deepen the Liberal rift and embarrass the minority Harper government, proposed a parliamentary motion along the lines of the Ignatieff-Quebec Liberal position. Harper, to avoid the trap, and desperate to win more votes in Quebec, then proposed his own motion. Media reports indicate it was drafted in consultation with Opposition leaders including Stéphane Dion, then a candidate for the federal Liberal leadership. After some hesitation, the Bloc signed on, as did the NDP. The Liberals split on the vote.

The Quebec Liberals then abandoned their motion at the party’s convention, apparently in the belief that the parliamentary vote absolved them of the need for further debate — although, as we shall see, the Quebec issue proved decisive to the outcome of the leadership contest.

If nothing else, the controversy was a further reminder of the political volatility of the unresolved question of Quebec's constitutional status. For the Liberals in particular, Ignatieff's challenge was agonizing; he was implicitly questioning the entire legacy associated with Pierre Trudeau, whose career as prime minister was devoted to fighting Quebec nationhood and attempting to substitute for it a "Canadian" nationality in which distinct national differences were dissolved in a melting pot of English-French official bilingualism from coast to coast.

That conception had appeared to triumph in 1982 with the "patriation" of the Canadian constitution from Westminster. The deal dropped Quebec's de facto veto over constitutional amendments and imposed a Charter of Rights that overrode Quebec's language laws. But the unilateral 1982 deal was largely opposed in Quebec, where the National Assembly voted overwhelmingly to reject it. Ever since, successive governments have been trying to restore the legitimacy of the Canadian state among Quebecers, without much success. On one level, that is the goal of Harper's motion.

When is a "Québécois" not a Quebecer?

Does the recent resolution represent a turn in Canadian politics? That was certainly how it was treated in the mass media in English Canada and — more importantly — in Quebec. In the Canadian constitution, Quebec has no national status but is just one of 10 provinces, albeit one with a distinct legal system (the Civil Code). There is no recognition of a "Quebec nation" or "a Québécois people". While not a constitutional change, the parliamentary resolution does seem to say something never before officially acknowledged within the federal system: that there is a Quebec nation.

On its face, the Harper motion is analogous with recent moves by governments in Britain and Spain, for example, to recognize the historical reality of distinct nations within their territory. In this sense, it is a concession to the historic movement of the Québécois for equal status — linguistic, social, economic and political — as a French-speaking minority within Canada. Yet the motion also indicates a clear intent to limit the potential political consequences.

The wording itself suggests a clue to the government's intention. The original Bloc motion, which had identified the "Québécois" as a nation, referred to them in English as "Quebeckers". That is, a territorial concept, encompassing everyone who inhabits Quebec irrespective of first language or ethnic origin. This is now the common definition of "Québécois" in Quebec. Harper's motion, in contrast, used the term "Québécois" in both French and English versions, an ethnic connotation implying that only those whose first language is French qualified as a "nation".

The Tories, like many other MPs, seemed confused by the terminology. *Le Devoir* reporter Hélène Buzzetti asked Harper's Quebec lieutenant Lawrence Cannon if the reference to "Québécois" included all residents of Quebec "without regard to the boat on which their ancestors arrived?" Not really, the minister replied. It referred only to the "French Canadians" who happened to live in Quebec.

Buzzetti then asked if she was a Québécoise since her Italian ancestors had arrived in America long after Champlain. She might be, Cannon replied, if she “felt” she was Québécoise. He added: “But I don’t think it’s a question of forcing someone who does not feel he is Québécois, who must necessarily be bound to that thing... There are some people who basically have opted for Canada.” What about the Quebec Anglophones, then, are they Québécois, the reporter persisted. “They can be,” said Cannon, whose Irish forebears settled in Quebec in 1795. “I consider myself to be Québécois.”

Cannon then accused the Bloc members of holding an ethnic “old stock” definition of Quebec. But Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe pointed out that in the Bloc’s view anyone who inhabits Quebec is a “Québécois”. It was the Tories, with their purely subjective definition, who were fostering “ethnic nationalism” — the same charge they and other federalists have levelled, unjustly, against Quebec nationalists such as Jacques Parizeau, the former Parti québécois leader.

That was the interpretation, as well, of many federalists. There is “no such thing as a Quebec nation”, protested columnist Lysiane Gagnon in the *Globe & Mail*. But there is a “French-Canadian nation” that includes French-speaking minorities outside Quebec, she said. And within Quebec, “French Canadian and Québécois are synonyms.” The Trudeau (and Chrétien) concept, in other words. Anglophones can’t be “Québécois”.

Michael Bliss, a “professor emeritus” writing in the *National Post*, was even more categorical. Nations are either ethnic, bound by “ties of blood”, or territorial, exercising political independence, he argued in an article entitled “Canada Under Attack”. Quebec is not independent, so its “nation” must be ethnic. “If Quebecers are a nation because they are of the French-Canadian tribe, the volk, as the Germans used to say, then we are legitimizing racial/ethnic concepts that are ugly almost beyond belief in the 21st century.” You get the drift? Today the nation, tomorrow the Reich. Let’s call it blissful ignorance.

Preparing for partition?

In fact, there is an ominous logic in the Harper resolution’s deliberate reference to a “Québécois”, not “Quebec” nation. It was noted by journalist Pierre Dubuc in *L’aut’journal*, a left sovereigntist newspaper.

“When Prime Minister Harper uses the term ‘Québécois’ rather than ‘Quebeckers’ in the English wording of his motion,” said Dubuc, he “wants to open the door to the partition of Quebec territory if the Yes wins in the next referendum.” Harper “is implying that he would recognize only the independence of a Quebec with a truncated territory”, the part inhabited by old-stock Francophone Quebecers. Dubuc pointed to Harper’s record on this question.

“Immediately after the 1995 referendum, Mr. Harper tabled a bill in the House of Commons stipulating that the federal government would hold its own referendum in Quebec on the same day as the Quebec government’s referendum. He even formulated a two-pronged question for the federal referendum... (a) Should Quebec separate from Canada and become an independent country without any special legal relationship to

Canada – YES or NO? (b) if Quebec separates from Canada, should my municipality continue to be part of Canada – YES or NO?”

Harper is not the first politician to think of invoking the spectre of partition in the face of a pro-sovereignty vote, Dubuc noted. In his recent memoir, *The Way it Works: Inside Ottawa*, Eddie Goldenberg, Jean Chrétien’s closest advisor for some 30 years, writes that in the 1995 referendum Chrétien, then prime minister, wanted to make the partition of Quebec a central theme of the federal campaign, around the slogan “If Canada is divisible, so is Quebec.” The threat was dropped only because the Quebec Liberals, leaders of the No side, were opposed to it, according to Goldenberg.

After the referendum, Chrétien came up with “Plan B”. He recruited federalist convert Stéphane Dion as his intergovernmental affairs minister, asked the Supreme Court for a legal opinion on secession and enacted the Clarity Act. The Act arrogates to the federal government the power to refuse to negotiate Quebec sovereignty after a successful Yes vote if Parliament deems there is an insufficient majority around a clear question. Its prototype was Harper’s earlier private member’s bill. Meanwhile, Ottawa continued to promote “Canadian unity” through such efforts as the sponsorship program and to fund groups partial to partition such as Alliance Quebec.

Quebec sovereignty supporters refer to the partitionist strategy as “the Irish solution” — a reference to England’s frustration of Irish independence in the 1920s through the separation from Eire of the Protestant Six Counties to form the Northern Ireland dependency of Westminster. Events in recent decades have revealed the disastrous repercussions of that “solution”.

A “nation” without the right to national self-determination?

Which brings us to the second half of the Harper motion: “... a nation within a united Canada”. One would think that if the “Québécois” are a nation within Canada, then surely they are a nation without Canada. Ah, but there’s the rub. Whoever says “nation” says... self-determination. The right of nations to self-determination has long been a fundamental concept of international law and diplomacy. It was first acknowledged more than a hundred years ago by the international workers and socialist movement; it entered the rhetoric of bourgeois discourse with the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. As a key ingredient of “Wilsonian” diplomacy, it was wielded by Washington as the United States sought to build its world order on the decline and ruin of the old European empires. And the right of nations to self-determination was the dominant principle in the wave of decolonization that swept the world in the aftermath of World War II. Today, of course, it is Washington that is the prime offender against this right as it tramples the self-determination and independence of a majority of the world’s nations. But Canada can offer its own examples.

For dominant nations, “self-determination” is not an issue. But for minority, dominated nations, it is of central importance. Although this distinction is now rarely invoked in Canada in polite constitutional discourse, it is fundamental to an understanding of the Quebec reality. A nation whose collective identity is denied or inhibited by another nation is not free to determine its own

future as a nation. Fueling the mass movement for Quebec independence, or “sovereignty”, is the growing perception among Québécois that the very existence of the federal regime blocks their ability to mount an effective defence of their language and culture and to develop fully as a nation that is master of its own fate.

The fundamental changes they want necessitate corresponding changes in Quebec’s constitutional status. And it is becoming clear to many, perhaps a majority, that whatever the legal and political relationship that an independent Quebec might subsequently negotiate with what remains of Canada, Quebec must first declare and win its political independence. The hostility expressed in English Canada even to Harper’s purely symbolic motion simply drives the point home.

Le Devoir correspondent Manon Cornellier expressed the impatience of even many Quebec federalists in a Nov. 29 column:

“When the Meech Lake Accord died, Quebec premier Robert Bourassa stated: ‘English Canada must clearly understand that, whatever is said, whatever is done, Quebec is now and always will be a distinct society, free to secure its destiny and its development.’ The motion adopted Monday night in Ottawa alters nothing. Nor did its absence for some years.

“The impediment to Quebec’s ability to be the master of its own choices lies elsewhere. First, in the absence of limits to the federal spending power, a source of Ottawa’s intrusions on provincial affairs. Second, in the refusal to grant the provinces the right to withdraw from federal programs in their spheres of jurisdiction, that is, a right of unconditional withdrawal accompanied by full financial compensation. Finally, in the federal government’s insistence that the fiscal imbalance will be resolved through increased cash transfers instead of transfers of tax points that it cannot take back. And of course, there is the refusal to resume constitutional discussions to get Quebec to adhere to the 1982 Constitution.”

Recognition of the Québécois nation, Cornellier added, “to be meaningful, requires... fundamental changes that can again give Quebec the room for manoeuvre that has been eroded by Ottawa since the Second World War.”

Even within the federal context, as many Quebecers have noted in recent years, recognition of Quebec as a distinct nation, not a province like the others, could help break the political logjam that so often is used to frustrate social reform in both Quebec and English Canada. Quebec’s resistance to “national standards” set and enforced by Ottawa often serves to thwart demands for meaningful social programs in Canada. Allowing Quebec to choose and shape its own social programs as a nation could free the rest of Canada to develop its own reforms enforced by standards not applying to Quebec.

Was Harper's motion, then, the thin edge of the wedge, opening the way to further challenges of Quebec's constitutional status? And did it have political implications going beyond the purely constitutional aspect?

The morning after the parliamentary vote, an editorial in the *Globe and Mail*, a supporter of Harper's gesture (and of Dion's candidacy), cynically sought to minimize any such interpretations: "No one should think that because of the political gamesmanship in Ottawa culminating in yesterday's exercise, the government of Canada should take concrete measures to appease Quebec, or for that matter any party that might be offended by the resolution. This particular game is done. Canada woke up this morning still one nation, undivided." Q.E.D.

An issue that haunts us still ...

One nation or two... or many? The refusal to address these questions frontally and clearly has dogged Canadian discourse on the national question since the 1960s, when Quebec began to assert its distinct nationhood by developing its own programs in areas within its jurisdiction and gradually seeking greater powers within the federation. The NDP's founding convention in 1961 adopted the "two nation" thesis, only to abandon it soon afterward when its Quebec component insisted on forming an autonomous party in the province.

The Tories came close to a split over the issue and Diefenbaker's incorrigible insistence on "one Canada". The Liberals under Pearson initially adopted a conciliatory line, but then embraced Trudeau's hard-line resistance to Quebec nationalism. The ghosts of these past battles hovered over the Liberal leadership contest.

After he signalled support for recognizing Quebec's national existence in the Constitution, the front-runner Ignatieff's campaign lost momentum and soon stalled. As the other candidates manoeuvred to defeat him, the Quebec question emerged as the key to a winning alignment of forces. Gerard Kennedy and Stéphane Dion, rated third and fourth in delegate preferences going into the convention, agreed between them that the one with the lower vote on the first ballot would desist in favour of the other.

It was a logical alliance; Dion's record on Quebec was clear while Kennedy's rock-hard opposition to recognizing Quebec or Quebecers as a nation had already won him the support of Pierre Trudeau's son Justin and David Orchard, the latter a shrill "one-nation" Diefenbaker clone and prominent ex-Tory who reportedly mobilized at least 100 votes for Kennedy on the first ballot. When Dion's vote surged and Rae was defeated on the third ballot, the Chrétien forces who had been his mainstay rallied as one to Dion to deliver the knockout blow to Ignatieff. And thus "Canada's natural governing party" was delivered to Mr. Plan B himself.

Which is not to say that Dion is simply a Chrétien clone, let alone another Trudeau. He is on record as opposing Chrétien's refusal to negotiate the parental leaves issue with Quebec and has criticized Ottawa's Millennium Scholarship program, which intruded on Quebec's jurisdiction over education. In sharp contrast to both Trudeau and Chrétien, he has characterized Quebec's Law 101, the Charter of the French Language, as "a great Canadian law". He supported the

Meech Lake constitutional agreement. And in his victory speech at the Liberal convention he called for a “federalism respectful of jurisdictions”, a “type of phrase not heard from a Liberal leader since Pearson” says constitutional scholar Guy Laforest, a former academic colleague of Dion.

In the last analysis, however, the public debate sparked by Ignatieff and Harper underscores once again the extreme unwillingness of Canada’s ruling class to accommodate Quebec’s national aspirations within the federal regime. Whether Dion’s leadership will help the federal Liberal party regain support they lost to the Tories in the last election remains to be seen. Likewise unclear is whether Harper’s motion will win the Tories new support among “soft” nationalists in Quebec. Dion voted for Harper’s motion, albeit “reluctantly”, he says, so whatever the differences between them on this issue they are unlikely to figure prominently in English Canada in the next election. Both see the resolution as purely symbolic, yielding nothing of substance to Quebec.

Nation and citizenship

In its implicit distinction between “Quebec” and “Québécois”, the Harper motion, whether consciously or not, impinges on a debate within Quebec itself over the definition of the nation. The predominant view among most Quebecers, including many who do not support Quebec independence, is that the Quebec nation encompasses all the inhabitants of Quebec territory irrespective of ethnic origin or mother tongue.

This is the “civic nation”, a political concept of citizenship. It was embraced by the federal NDP when it adopted a resolution drafted by its Quebec supporters at its most recent convention, in September 2006.

“The national character of Québec,” it says, “is based primarily, but not exclusively, on:

1. a primarily Francophone society in which French is recognized as the language of work and the common public language;
2. a specific culture, unique in America, that is expressed by a sense of identity with and belonging to Quebec;
3. a specific history;
4. its own political, economic, cultural and social institutions, including government institutions and institutions in civil society.”

The resolution has some important flaws. But what it says about Quebec’s national character is a useful starting point for discussions on this question within the party, the unions and the broader labour movement in English Canada. The NDP MPs supported both the Harper motion and a similar one by the Bloc that omitted the “united Canada” reference.

The concept of the civic nation is explained at some length by Pierre Dubuc, in his article on the Harper motion cited earlier, although he does not use that terminology.

“Contrary to what is insinuated by Michael Bliss, the Quebec nation is not based on ties of blood. It includes, of course, the Tremblays, the Gagnons and the Pelletiers, but also the Curzis, the Braithwaites, the Ryans and the Mouranis. It is a historically constituted community tracing its origins to New France and having assimilated over the centuries people of various origins. These now constitute some 11% of the Quebec nation.

“A nation is not an ephemeral phenomenon, but rather the result of durable and regular relations resulting from common life from one generation to another on the same territory. This is expressed through a common language and culture, but also through a common economic life with its own institutions such as the Caisse de dépôt, the state-owned corporations, the Desjardins Movement and its trade union organizations.

“Nations do not live in isolation from each other. They are buffeted by history (wars, conquests) and migratory population flows. For these reasons, the presence of national or cultural minorities on the territory of a given nation is not unusual. In fact, it is the norm. Quebec is no exception, with its Anglophone minority and its minorities of immigrant origin (Greeks, Portuguese, Italians, Haitians, Arabs).

“In these normal contexts, the members of these communities assimilate to the dominant national group within a few generations. In Quebec, the process is longer because of the intense competition between the Francophone majority and the Anglophone minority to assimilate the Allophones [non-Francophone immigrants]. According to the Office de la langue française, the majority of language transfers (56%) are still toward the Anglophone minority, the spearhead of a continental Anglophone majority.

“Whatever their ethnic origin, whether they are Francophones, Anglophones or Allophones, all inhabitants of Quebec share the same Quebec citizenship and have the same rights. They are all “Quebeckers”. It is the law of territory [le droit du sol] that applies.”

(Dubuc has expanded on these ideas in a provocative essay, “Sans Nous Qui est Québécois?”)

Constituent assembly

Dubuc, like most Quebec nationalists, also makes a distinction between nation and citizenship. He defines a distinct “Francophone Québécois nation” within the broader “Quebec nation” of citizens, the latter including “the Aboriginal peoples, the Anglophone minority and the cultural minorities”.

“We should, at the earliest possible opportunity,” he says, “establish what their specific rights would be and how they will be protected in the future constitution of an independent Quebec.”

In fact, a means by which these and many other related issues of identity and rights can be resolved must be found if a clear and compelling majority of Quebecers are to be convinced that their national and social emancipation from oppression and exploitation entails winning political independence as a nation. The new party of the left, Québec solidaire (QS) puts the call for

election of a Quebec constituent assembly to discuss and determine such issues democratically at the core of its approach to the national question. Dubuc doesn't raise this; he is a member of the Parti québécois, which proposes to leave all questions about social content and political rights within a sovereign Quebec until after Quebec has become a sovereign country.

Even the concept of the "civic" or territorial nation may require clarification. In the mid-1980s the Quebec National Assembly, on a PQ motion, recognized a dozen or so aboriginal peoples as "distinct nations having their own identity and exercising their rights within Quebec".

Québec solidaire goes further. It voted at its recent policy convention to recognize the right to self-determination of these aboriginal nations. At the same time, the delegates voted to table for further discussion a motion that a QS government would organize "equitable representation of ... the aboriginal peoples" in its proposed constituent assembly. François Saillant, a QS leader, pointed out that relations with Quebec's indigenous peoples should be on a "nation to nation" basis. "We can't be making decisions for them," he said.

These and related issues of national identity and self-determination have been debated for years within Quebec. If nothing else, the Harper motion — insubstantial as it is — has helped to refocus attention on them in the rest of Canada.

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Québec Solidaire Adopts a Program for Government

By Richard Fidler

MONTRÉAL – Quebec’s new party of the left, Québec solidaire, held its first policy convention here on November 24-26. The 320 delegates — 48% of them women — debated, amended and adopted a draft platform for the next general election in Quebec, expected in 2007.

Québec solidaire has grown rapidly since its founding in February of this year. It now boasts 5,100 members in some 70 local associations organized on an electoral constituency basis, as well as student groups on the major college and university campuses. It is registering between 4% and 8% support in province-wide opinion polls, and in by-elections this year its candidates garnered up to 22% of the votes.

The February convention had adopted a declaration of principles identifying the party’s key “values”— social justice, equality between women and men, viable development, antiracism, pacifism, and international solidarity, as its statutes proclaim — but not a formal program. So this was the first opportunity for the members to begin spelling out what the party stands for. The adoption of a limited election platform was seen as the initial step in an ongoing process to develop a more comprehensive program for the party.

The overall theme chosen by the QS central leadership, the national coordinating committee, was addressed to what the party proposed to do in the “first 1,000 days of the Québec solidaire government”. While this might seem like an ambitious goal for a party that has yet to elect a single member to the National Assembly, it expressed a positive commitment to build a mass party that can fight for political power in Quebec City.

The convention laboured under severe time constraints. Many draft proposals could not be discussed and consequently were referred for further consideration and adoption to the party’s policy commission — over the objections of many delegates who argued that this unfinished business should be debated at a forthcoming National Committee meeting open to all interested members.

Social policy reforms

Some of the major resolutions that were adopted, as amended, are summarized in the accompanying article. With the exception of the proposals related to the Quebec national question and aboriginal self-determination, they amount to a rather modest set of social policy reforms not substantially different from the kind of progressive reform agenda and Keynesian wealth-distribution concepts once advocated by the social-democratic NDP in the English-Canadian provinces.

The limited content of this platform may seem surprising in a party that has united cadres from various socialist and left nationalist currents with prominent feminists and community activists. The explanation for the platform's limited nature may lie in part in the current political context.

Québec solidaire resulted from a fusion between the Union des forces progressistes (UFP) and Option citoyenne (OC). The UFP was a coalition of the political left that developed amidst the unitary dynamic of the "altermondialiste" global justice mobilizations of trade-unionists and youth that peaked in Quebec City in 2001 and the massive antiwar movement that mobilized up to a quarter million in a march against the Iraq war in February 2003. Option citoyenne was formed in 2004 by leaders and activists in antipoverty organizations and major popular mobilizations such as the March for Bread and Roses (1995) and the World March of Women. (Background: *Socialist Voice* #30, *Socialist Voice* #55)

However, while its founding components originated on the crest of mass mobilizations in the early years of this decade, Québec solidaire was born amidst a serious decline of mass actions by the broad social movements over the last two years, and in the wake of some major defeats of Quebec's trade unions following massive strikes and demonstrations waged in opposition to the vicious right-wing offensive unleashed by the Charest Liberal government immediately after its election in 2003. Even the student movement, which waged the biggest student strike in Quebec history in early 2005, is today in a relative lull.

The women's movement has been placed on the defensive by the Charest Liberal government's moves to undermine childcare through increased privatization of services and huge cuts in funding. The antiwar movement is largely demobilized. Environmental activists are reeling from Charest's moves to privatize Mount Orford parkland and corporate stratagems such as lawsuits designed to muzzle opponents of the proposed liquefied natural gas terminal near Quebec City. As for the trade unions, they are barely present on the political landscape. These setbacks appear to have negatively affected the new left party's conception of what is possible in the current context. In any event, the platform also reflects a deliberate policy choice.

A minimum platform, but linked to a broader perspective?

In a remarkably frank directive sent to the members in late spring, François Cyr, the chair of the policy commission, outlined the QS leadership's objectives in developing the election platform. "We are no longer a splinter group or an ideological pressure group but we are still very far from a party of government," he wrote. The task is to develop "a limited number of proposals . . . conceived in terms of a governmental project that is immediately realizable in the present framework — that is, provincial and neoliberal."

Aware that this restriction would not sit well with many party activists, Cyr offered a mollifying thought. "However, we should link each proposal for immediate realization with a broader perspective opening the door to profound structural changes." As an example, he suggested, "we may propose a large immediate increase in the minimum wage and paid vacations, but we should also commit to opening an extensive public debate on work, its remuneration, its increasing

insecurity in our society including the notion of minimum wage, reconciliation of work and family responsibilities and a reduction in the work week.” In the adopted platform, however, Cyr’s example is reduced to the following trite phrase: “Québec solidaire will undertake a consultation on the various options to reduce poverty in a sustainable and respectful way, such as, for example, the citizenship income [*revenu de citoyenneté* — essentially a guaranteed annual wage].”

To begin the process, the QS National Committee appointed a dozen or so “theme commissions”, each to develop policy on a particular program topic. All party members were invited to participate in the work of these commissions, which met through the summer. In mid-October, their discussion papers were published on the QS intranet; they totalled more than 100 pages!

In early November, the national leadership released a draft election platform that purported to synthesize the key ideas in the theme commission reports — a 38-page document including texts outlining the thinking behind each proposal. QS members in the local associations discussed this platform, adopted amendments and elected delegates to the convention. The final compendium of proposals with literally hundreds of proposed amendments, an 88-page document, was handed to the delegates as they arrived at the convention.

Attempts to strengthen platform

Needless to say, it was impossible for the delegates to fully digest or process this mass of materials in two days of deliberations. However, the convention debates did indicate a clear desire by the membership to strengthen the final document by incorporating some key demands advanced by trade unions and the women’s, student and other social movements — many of which had been expressed in the theme commission reports but ignored in the draft platform.

For example, while the draft said a QS government would “reduce” school fees and state subsidies to private schools, the delegates voted to “eliminate” fees at all levels of education and stop private school funding. The draft’s proposal to create a new corporate entity, Éole-Québec, to develop wind-turbine power did not address the role of the privately owned companies, which are now busy signing contracts with the government — a much-disputed issue in Quebec. The convention voted in favour of nationalization of this sector of the power industry, a popular demand that is put forward by major trade unions.

On the other hand, some proposals to radicalize the platform failed, often by narrow margins, after debate. For example, many delegates wanted to nationalize the entire pharmaceutical industry, a major industry in Quebec; however, the adopted proposal to create a state-owned agency, Pharma-Québec, would limit its role to drug purchase, research and partial production of (generic) drugs while leaving intact the multinational drug companies. Proposals to implement a \$10 per hour minimum wage immediately, not gradually, and to extend access to free drug care to all low-income Quebecers, not just those on welfare, were defeated when party leaders argued it would be precipitous and “cost too much”.

What about Afghanistan?

There is a striking omission in the adopted platform: its lack of an international dimension.

The theme commission on international questions had proposed that a Québec solidaire government would support the antiwar movement, quit the imperialist military alliances NATO and NORAD, abolish the army and replace it with a “civil force of territorial surveillance to protect national sovereignty but not intervene abroad”. It called for withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan, no participation in the “supposed war on terrorism alongside the United States”, conversion of the war industry to civilian production, abolition of security certificates and opening Quebec’s doors to “refugees fleeing the war or objecting to participating in it” as well as to victims of sexual violence and sexist or homophobic persecution.

The commission, in a discussion of “the globalization we want”, suggested that a QS government would, among other measures, “consolidate relations of cooperation with progressive governments” and create an international agency to promote endogenous development based on food self-sufficiency, fair trade, and economic development focused on co-operative principles and local production. It called for a government review of existing international trade and investment agreements such as NAFTA, although it did not call for their repeal.

This international dimension was missing from the draft platform. Because debate in the membership and the convention was confined to the draft, there were no amendments and no real discussion of these issues and demands at the convention. It seems that the determination to limit the platform to what is possible within a “provincial and neoliberal” framework is being interpreted quite narrowly.

That orientation by the QS leadership is surprising, however. International issues figured prominently in the last Quebec general election, in April 2003. Two months earlier, up to a quarter million Québécois had marched against the impending invasion of Iraq — the largest antiwar demonstration in the history of Canada. Antiwar sentiment was so strong that the leaders of all three capitalist parties sported white ribbons, the symbol of opposition to the Iraq war, on their lapels. The fledgling UFP made the war a central issue in its election campaign.

A major issue in Quebec politics today is the Canadian army occupation of Afghanistan. The majority antiwar sentiment in Canada is highest in Quebec. The Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment is now being sent to Afghanistan, and soon the caskets will be returning to Quebec towns and cities. Shouldn’t a Québec solidaire government have something to say about that?

... and capitalist globalization?

Also in the 2003 election, then Premier Bernard Landry of the Parti québécois made his party’s support for the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) a central plank in his campaign. The PQ has consistently supported NAFTA, the FTA and other neoliberal trade and investment deals in the belief that improved access to foreign markets and foreign investment would open up more elbow room for a sovereign Quebec. The UFP argued strongly to the contrary, noting that further subordination to the dictates of capital undermined democracy and national sovereignty.

One conceivable response to capitalist globalization was indicated in a recent issue of *Résistance*, a magazine published by the International Socialists. QS member Benoit Renaud suggested that Québec solidaire advocate in its platform Quebec's participation in ALBA, the agreement for barter arrangements and low-price exchange of badly needed goods and services between the revolutionary governments in Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. "We could send buses, trains, planes and inexpensive drugs to the other three countries in exchange for oil, natural gas, sugar, medical personnel . . . and thousands of Spanish teachers!"

The failure of the QS platform to address such issues seems inconsistent with the party's goal to be a political voice for the grassroots organizations and mass movements from which it has emerged.

When some delegates sought to amend the draft platform to include opposition to imperialist military alliances and capitalist trade and investment deals, QS leader Françoise David opposed the motion as "premature", saying the party needed more time to debate these questions. But the QS leadership has in fact addressed international questions — as it should — although not altogether coherently. For example, David and co-leader Amir Khadir, in an article published in *Le Devoir* March 18-19, criticized the "hijacking" of the Canadian army's "mandate" in Afghanistan, but expressed Québec solidaire's support for Canadian participation in "a genuine UN peace initiative . . . to counter the influence of the warlords". After the federal NDP convention adopted a resolution calling for withdrawal of Canadian forces from Afghanistan, the QS National Council in late September echoed the NDP's call for withdrawal. But the Council, in the same resolution, endorsed the David-Khadir call for Canadian participation in a military force under UN rather than NATO auspices. These contradictory positions have not been debated, let alone adopted, by the membership.

For a Constituent Assembly

The platform's position on the Quebec national question is another contentious item. Although the national question was addressed in only one of the five "themes" in the draft platform, it was a defining issue in the creation of Québec solidaire. The fusion of UFP and OC was programmatically based on the latter's evolution toward the UFP's pro-sovereignty position. As the declaration of principles adopted at Québec solidaire's founding convention stated:

"Quebec must have all the powers necessary to its full development socially, economically, culturally and politically. It is denied this within the federal framework. Our party is therefore in favour of sovereignty. Although it is not a guarantee, sovereignty is a means of providing Quebec with the tools it needs to implement its social agenda and to fully develop as a people."
[An English translation of the declaration is posted on the QS website.]

The election platform's position on the national question is centered on the proposal for a specially elected assembly to lead a vast public consultation and discussion on Quebec's political and constitutional status and draw up a proposed constitution for a sovereign Quebec. This draft constitution would then be submitted for adoption in a referendum. The initial draft of the

platform, however, omitted any reference to sovereignty in its call for a constituent assembly, sovereignty being mentioned only as a defining “value” in the preamble to the platform as a whole. A sovereign Quebec was inserted as a specific goal on the eve of the congress, in response to numerous amendments to that effect from local associations.

There are in fact lingering differences among QS members over the role and importance of Quebec independence or sovereignty in the party’s program. Some, possibly a majority, favour an independent Quebec and many would cast the party’s entire program in the framework of a national liberation struggle. Others are more diffident or uncertain on the question and a few are opposed to Quebec sovereignty. In many ways, these differences reflect similar differences within the population as a whole and the fact that sovereignty as it has been predominantly defined by the Parti québécois is seen by many as little more than a change in constitutional status not clearly linked to meaningful improvement in the social conditions of most Québécois. To some degree the QS platform’s focus on process — the constituent assembly — rather than the objective, sovereignty or independence, bridges these differences.

“Beyond provincialism”?

That said, the concept of a constituent assembly is a powerful feature of the platform. It radically demarks Québec solidaire from the PQ’s “étapisme”, or stages strategy — first “sovereignty”, then (maybe) later we define the new country — in which Quebecers are simply asked to vote yes or no to a constitutional formula, devoid of social content, “astutely” cooked up in government backrooms with little if any possibility of themselves influencing the content of the question.

Québec solidaire, in contrast, starts from a profoundly democratic perspective of what it terms “popular sovereignty”, a process through which the masses of Québécois can themselves determine the kind of country they want to build. It has deep roots in Quebec history, going back to the demands of the Lower Canada rebels in 1837 and reflected more recently in the popular Estates General organized by nationalist organizations in the late 1960s.

The QS approach has the potential to appeal to many sovereigntists frustrated by the PQ’s inability to create “winning conditions” around that party’s neoliberal program. Moreover, it points to the need to go beyond the “provincial and neoliberal” context. Even the modest reforms projected in the QS platform may not be “immediately realizable” without a major shift in the relationship of forces, both within Quebec and between Quebec and Canada.

As a number of speakers noted in the convention debate, compelling support for Quebec independence will be won only through a vast “pedagogic exercise” in which a strong majority of the population can begin to see the relevance of state independence to their own liberation from exploitation and oppression.

Given the differing political dynamics between Quebec and the rest of Canada, it is clear that no program of fundamental social change, still less socialism, could be implemented in Quebec today without a radical change in Quebec’s constitutional status — freeing it from the constraints

of limited provincial jurisdiction, residual and largely unfettered federal spending power, and ultimately the federal courts, military and police authority. This reality is the driving force behind the quest for an independent Quebec among Québécois progressives. These issues were strongly addressed in the report of the theme commission on sovereignty, which advocated “going beyond provincialism” and spoke of “defining our proposed society in the framework of economic and social liberation”.

Beyond electoralism?

Québec solidaire is attempting to fill a wide space that exists to the left of the three capitalist parties (Liberals, PQ and ADQ) that now dominate the Quebec political landscape. But will it be filled by a small party that offers little more than a kinder, gentler version of the neoliberal PQ and yet another, but smaller, pro-sovereignty alternative to the other capitalist parties?

Like its predecessor the UFP, Québec solidaire has sometimes defined itself as “a party of the streets and the ballot boxes”. But it is the party’s electoral aspirations that have prevailed since its founding. This convention confirmed the electoralist orientation. The exclusive focus on the general election is problematic, however.

For one thing, it is unlikely that any QS candidate can be elected in the forthcoming election, given the vagaries of the first-past-the-post system. The Charest government has yet to table its promised electoral reform bill, but the prevailing sentiment in the National Assembly is to limit any semblance of proportional representation to parties with at least 15% of the popular vote — far more than the opinion polls attribute to QS. And even this limited reform is not slated for implementation until the next decade.

If the party bases its entire activity on hopes for an electoral breakthrough within the next few years, it risks seriously disorienting and disappointing many of its members and supporters.

More fundamentally, if Québec solidaire confines its appeal, electorally or otherwise, to the neoliberal and provincial context, it may undermine its potential to build a strong base among union militants, néo-Québécois, and young people looking for a fighting alternative to environmental destruction, capitalist repression, racism, and national and gender oppression, and offering a realistic perspective of “another world” free of oppression and exploitation.

A work in progress

At this point it is not easy to define the new party. To be sure, its values are feminist, ecologist and sovereigntist. But it is not clearly anticapitalist or even consistently anti-imperialist. There is a wide spectrum of views within the party, and an unresolved and still not clearly articulated tension within it between a social-democratic current, predominant in the leadership bodies, and a more militant and largely anticapitalist left.

This leadership, to give it its due, has immense authority and respect among the party’s membership. It has managed, through hard work and dedication, to merge two quite distinct “corporate cultures” — the remnants of an often fractious left with a feminist movement that

privileges dialogue and consensus — into a new party in which the founding components no longer simply coexist but are united around a compelling vision of social solidarity. This is a major achievement, unprecedented in Quebec and Canadian history.

Québec solidaire is perhaps best viewed as a work in progress. It has assembled much of the “political left”. The party has attracted older militants from the Mao-Stalinist and Trotskyist parties and groups of the past. And it has made room for groups like Gauche socialiste, the International Socialists and the Quebec Communist Party to join as “collectives”, although these collectives are not given formal representation in the leading bodies. The collectives have not to this point functioned as overt political tendencies within the party. Nor have they projected a clear alternative to the party’s present course that can help to transform the party into an effective vehicle for anticapitalist mobilization. However, many of the more progressive amendments to the draft platform were proposed by QS associations in which the radical collectives are well represented. These included Taschereau and Jean-Lesage ridings in Quebec City, Mercier in Montréal and Outaouais in Gatineau.

A truly remarkable feature of the party is the high proportion of the membership who are women. This was very evident at the convention. The prominent presence of women members in the debates and chairing the proceedings seemed to create an atmosphere of genuine dialogue and a lack of demagoguery that has been very uncommon in other left-wing organizations. This is an extremely positive feature of Québec solidaire.

Another promising feature is the participation of students and other young activists in the party. The younger delegates at the QS convention contributed an infectious enthusiasm to the proceedings and they were often the sponsors of the more progressive amendments.

However, the party has been less successful in winning wider layers of the “social left”. In particular, it has almost no presence in the trade unions in a province with the highest rate of union membership (almost 40%) in Canada. Among the delegates to the QS convention were Arthur Sandborn, president of the Montréal Central Council of the CSN; André Frappier, a leader of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (and a former federal NDP candidate); and Serge Roy, Québec solidaire candidate in Taschereau riding and former president of the Quebec civil servants’ union (SFPQ). But the party as a whole pays little attention to developments in the unions. And there is a small layer of union activists who have chosen instead to join SPQ-Libre, a left ginger group now a recognized “political club” within the Parti québécois — the party supported by most politically-minded union members and leaders.

Equally important, Québec solidaire does not appear to have much influence in Quebec’s minority ethnic and immigrant “cultural communities”. There were very few non-white faces at this convention, a glaring contrast to the multi-ethnic composition of Quebec today, particularly in Montréal where QS has its strongest presence.

To overcome these and other limitations, QS might be well advised to pay less attention to what is “immediately realizable” in a “provincial and neoliberal” context, and focus its attention more

on becoming a tribune and mobilizer for all those social forces that are seeking a way to challenge and go beyond provincial status and neoliberalism.

Clearly, the members of Québec solidaire have only begun to tackle the difficult task of building a broad party of the left that can present a viable alternative, both “at the ballot boxes and in the streets”, to capitalist exploitation and national oppression. This convention, for all its limitations, marked an important initial step in this long march. Socialists in English Canada and elsewhere have every interest in following closely the development of this new party with concern, sympathy and solidarity.

Québec solidaire’s 25 “concrete and realizable commitments”

The adopted platform is grouped around five themes, each theme including five major proposals for the program of a Québec solidaire government in its first term of office. Here are some of the key proposals.

Governing together

- *election of a constituent assembly “to consult the people of Quebec on their political and constitutional future”*. Based on this consultation, the assembly will draft proposals on Quebec’s constitutional status and political institutions. A referendum will then pose two distinct questions: “one on Quebec’s political and constitutional future, the other on a Quebec constitution”.
- recognition of the right to self-determination for the 11 aboriginal nations already recognized in Quebec law; nation-to-nation negotiations on autonomy and aboriginal claims to resources and territory; measures to improve the living conditions of native peoples living off the reserves.

Growing together

- adoption of a comprehensive family policy including payment of a universal parental allowance; tax deductions for parents working full-time in the home care of preschool and school-age children to the age of 12.
- gradual elimination of school fees and private schools, and adequate funding to guarantee everyone a free, secular and quality education; elimination of student debts and establishment of a public financial assistance program for students corresponding to their needs.

Living together in a Quebec without poverty

- gradual increase in the minimum wage to \$10 an hour indexed to the cost of living; increase in social assistance to cover all essential needs; abolition of waiting periods for immigrants’ access to medicare; construction of 8,000 units per year of ecologically produced social housing; free drugs for social assistance recipients.

- establishment of Pharma-Québec, a “public pole for the purchase, research and production of pharmaceutical products”.
- a national campaign to counter violence against women, including state financial support for women’s groups.

Building together in a just Quebec

- full taxation of capital gains and greater taxation of dividends, adjustment of personal income tax brackets to tax the wealthy more and the poor less; lowering the RRSP contribution limits; lowering the Quebec sales tax on critical consumption goods while raising it on luxury products.
- repeal of the anti-union legislation imposed by the Charest Liberal government; promotion of trade-union organization and access, especially in sectors occupied primarily by women; reform of the Labour Code to allow trade union organization and bargaining by sectors and industries with more than one employer.
- three weeks of vacation after one year of employment, five weeks after five years, and a broad debate on how to reduce hours of work.

Living together in a green Quebec

- nationalization of wind-power to create Éole-Québec, a publicly owned company like Hydro-Québec.
- establishment of local forestry committees, non-profit agencies to manage ecologically the province’s public forests, collect royalties and promote value-added transformation industries in the forest industry.
- massive investment in public transit and energy efficiency to fight climate change and go beyond the Kyoto protocol limits. Promotion of renewable energy sources in place of fossil fuels.
- fighting privatization of water by making water a public property under the Civil Code.
- mandatory labelling of genetically modified organisms and a moratorium on their cultivation; increased support to organic farmers and implementation of green technology practices.

In and around the convention

Québec solidaire has a web site and an intranet site for members, but has no other publications. This void has been filled to some degree by independent publications that are sympathetic to the party. The major one is *À Bâbord* (the name roughly translates as Portside), a large-format professionally produced bimonthly magazine founded in 2003, which carries extensive news and debate on Quebec and international developments from a generally socialist and feminist perspective. Another is *Presse-toi à Gauche* (PTàG, “Quick, to the left”), an on-line “tribune”

initiated earlier this year by QS members in Québec City, many of them identified with Gauche socialiste, a collective within the party.

PTàG produced an 8-page print version for the convention, and its editors say they plan to start publishing a monthly newspaper next year. In the period leading up to the QS convention, PTàG was the only medium that provided a forum for public debate of the draft resolutions.

Another publication that supports Québec solidaire is Résistance, produced by the Quebec wing of the International Socialists.

Both the IS and Gauche socialiste maintained literature tables in the convention foyer, GS distributing an introductory pamphlet and selling copies of *Inprecor*, the international French-language publication of the Fourth International. In addition, the QS women's commission sponsored a used-book sale featuring many old classics of the Quebec workers and feminist movement.

Will NDP split Quebec left?

Québec solidaire leader Pierre Dostie writes in the November-December issue of *Canadian Dimension* that the Quebec section of the federal New Democratic Party is contemplating the launch of a “provincial” wing of the party that would compete with Québec solidaire. Dostie briefly reviews the tangled history of previous attempts to found a Quebec NDP — none with lasting success — and warns that “if the NDP ventures onto the Quebec provincial scene, this may seriously harm the unity process currently underway within the Quebec Left.” He asks:

“How would the creation of a Quebec NDP contribute to the unity of progressives across Canada if it divided the Quebec Left? The simple adoption of a resolution recognizing Quebec's right to self-determination is not enough to rehabilitate the NDP in the eyes of Quebecers. At several points in its history, the CCF-NDP has recognized this right — only to abandon this position under pressure from various sources in the party.

“The credibility of the federal NDP in Quebec depends not only on a clear position that will link Quebec's national question to social questions, but also on the party's subsequently sticking to this position over time! Wouldn't it be better for the NDP to invest in a process that developed alliances with existing organizations in Quebec? These kinds of relationships would offer a good opportunity to put the principles of self-determination and asymmetry into practice.” [Not on line. French version in *Presse-toi à gauche*]

In fact, a convention of the Quebec section of the federal NDP in mid-November rejected a resolution to found a provincial NDP. The resolution is reported to have won the support of some 40% of the delegates, however. And its supporters are maintaining a web site to agitate for their position.]

The debate among NDP members over whether to “go provincial” and compete with Québec solidaire is being pursued there and on two other sites: the official Quebec NDP's, and on rabble.ca.

As these debates indicate, a “provincial” NDP would be distinguished from Québec solidaire primarily by its support of the federal regime — hardly the basis on which to construct any kind of alternative to the capitalist parties. Previous attempts over the last 75 years to mount a federalist party of the left in Quebec have all failed.

An overdue apology

Last summer Ginette Lewis, a leader of Québec solidaire and of Gauche socialiste in Quebec City, was widely denounced in the corporate media when, in a speech to a demonstration protesting Israel’s assault on Lebanon, she defended the “staunch resistance” of the Lebanese led by Hezbollah. Party leaders Françoise David and Amir Khadir issued a press release dissociating the party from the comments attributed to Lewis. While conceding that there had been “an overabundance” of bombing by Israel, David said the left must consider “all of the victims” — apparently an allusion to Israeli casualties. The local party leadership was told to investigate the matter, and there were hints of possible disciplinary sanctions against Lewis.

At a plenary session of the QS convention, party president Alexa Conradi went to the podium and expressed a public apology to Ginette Lewis on behalf of the party’s national executive. “Unacceptable things” had been said by some party leaders, she said. The delegates spontaneously rose in a standing ovation for Lewis.

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Cuba Stands Firm!

On its 50th Anniversary, the Revolution is still confident and creative in defiance of imperialism

By John Riddell

Thousands of international guests joined 300,000 Cubans in Havana December 2 celebrating the 50th anniversary of the birth of Cuba's revolutionary army in struggle against the Batista dictatorship as well as Fidel Castro's 80th birthday. Among them were three notable leaders from abroad: Bolivian president Evo Morales, Nicaraguan president-elect Daniel Ortega, and Haitian president René Preval – all recently elected against the will of U.S. imperialism.

Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, whose government is Cuba's closest ally, stayed home to prepare for presidential elections the following day. When the results came in, he dedicated his victory to revolutionary Cuba and Fidel Castro.

The presidents' tributes, in a time of rising popular struggles across Latin America, symbolized a turn in the road for Cuba: the embattled island no longer stands alone.

Speaking on December 2, Acting President Raúl Castro underlined his government's continued intransigence. Despite Washington's "brazen inference," he said, "popular and revolutionary movements are getting stronger" across Latin America.

The U.S. attempt to "economically annex Latin America by way of the FTAA [Free Trade Agreement of the Americas] was thwarted," Raúl said. Meanwhile, ALBA, the framework for fraternal economic collaboration backed by Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia, "is taking its place ... to benefit the dispossessed masses."

The ailing Fidel Castro sent greetings but did not attend the celebration. Still, the spirit of this event, and everything that has happened since Fidel withdrew from governmental posts, shows that the transition to a new leadership team has not weakened the revolution.

Internationalism

For 50 years, the Cuban revolution has seen its fate as tied to the world struggle against imperialism and for human solidarity. It has committed its slender resources to support these movements. Today, the gains of popular movements in Latin America are opening new prospects for Cuba. And tens of thousands of Cuban working people are taking part in humanitarian aid abroad, including in Venezuela, Bolivia, Haiti, East Timor, Pakistan, and Africa.

Meanwhile, as Raúl noted, the U.S.-led "so-called 'crusade on terrorism' is heading down the path to inevitable and humiliating defeat."

In Latin America, according to Ricardo Alarcón, President of Cuba's national assembly, "the current situation is better than that which the Bolsheviks encountered," referring to the revolutionary crisis that swept Russia in 1917. (*La Jornada*, Nov. 16)

Conversely, Cuba has helped inspire and shape the Latin American upsurge.

Achievements

Cuba's achievements and creativity in health care, education, sports, and cultural activities, and biotechnology—unique in the Third World—are widely acknowledged.

Less known is the success of the Cuban tourist industry in building the domestic economy by supplying two-thirds of visitors' needs from within the island, compared to a norm of 10%-25% elsewhere in the Caribbean. (Hal Klepak, *Cuba's Military*, pages 189-190)

Cuba has also created the world's most successful model of non-intrusive humanitarian aid, which promotes rather than obstructs autonomous, endogenous development of Third World nations.

The Cubans have carried out major economic retrenchments, as in the sugar industry, by discussing through proposed adjustments with affected workers while guaranteeing them a continued livelihood and fully supported educational opportunities.

Cuba has been lauded by David Suzuki, among others, as the world leader in sustainable and ecologically sound food production, based on assuring to producers security of land tenure.

The World Wildlife Foundation, which compiles the world's most authoritative comparison of national environmental conditions, has acknowledged, as Castro noted on December 2, that Cuba is "the only country on Earth to meet the minimum requirements for sustainable development."

Cuba's progress in such fields has continued in the teeth of 15 years of bitter economic deprivation brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the increasingly aggressive U.S. blockade—which placed the revolution's survival in question.

Workers' and Farmers' Power

The Cuban revolution's resilience rests on underlying strengths:

- It has won and maintained independence in an area that U.S. imperialism regarded and still regards as its exclusive subject domain.
- It has broken the economic grip of Cuban and foreign capitalists, so that priority could go to the people's welfare, not private profit.
- It has built an army—backed by a massive people's militia—that is loyal to Cuba's working people and has a proud record of anti-imperialist combat abroad.
- It has engaged the working population in the exercise of political power, through a process that Alarcón calls "the parliamentarization of society." (For a full discussion of Cuba's political order, see *Cuba: A Revolution in Motion*)

- It has remained loyal to the revolution's commitment to internationalism, to the world-wide struggle against imperialist domination and capitalist exploitation.
- Above all, for half a century it has maintained a state based on Cuba's workers and farmers, one whose policies are shaped to defend their interests and to hold open the perspective of advancing toward socialism.

50 Years of Defiance

Despite this, many Marxists and radicals are sharply critical of Cuba. Their analysis focuses not on Cuba's achievements, but on the features it shares with capitalist society.

Many Marxists also fault Cuba for deviating from the blueprint of workers democracy said to have been realized in the Russian revolution, a standard to which—if truth be told—even the early Soviet republic did not measure up.

There is some validity to such criticisms. Cuba suffers from exploitation by capitalist investors and is under enormous pressure from world market forces. Characteristic capitalist evils such as social inequality and prejudice against Blacks or women, greatly reduced since the revolution, still survive in Cuba. They even regained some ground under the pressures of its economic crisis in the 1990s.

Moreover, the unrelenting U.S.-led campaign to forcibly overthrow Cuba's government and social order distorts Cuba's attempt to build a popular democracy, demanding of Cuba that it maintain a posture of full national unity in face of the external foe. The Cuban government justifiably believes the country would be imperiled if it gave free rein to "human rights organizations" or "NGOs" that are in fact inspired, sponsored, and financed by a U.S. government dedicated to subjugating the island.

But in the final analysis, the critics are missing the point. Cuba cannot achieve socialism within the confines of a small and underdeveloped island. It makes no sense to condemn Cuba for not achieving the impossible. What Cuba has done, with unparalleled success, is to end the political rule of the capitalist class, resist capitalist economic pressures, win as much ground as possible for socialist principles of human solidarity and production for human need rather than profit—and help open the door for other countries in the region to take the same path.

This has been acknowledged by Noam Chomsky, himself one of Cuba's critics. "Cuba has become a symbol of courageous resistance to attack," he says. Under the most severe conditions [Cubans] are doing things that others can't do." He cites "Cuba's role in the liberation of Africa. It's an astonishing achievement."

This record is all the more astonishing given that despite errors, false starts, and setbacks, Cuba has persisted in defying imperialism and resisting capitalist pressure for 50 years.

No other revolution in world history has preserved its vitality and creativity over such a span of time. In this respect the Cuban achievement outshines that of the Bolsheviks, who were so quickly divided and undone by a counterrevolutionary bureaucracy.

The Special Period

Still, the last 15 years of hard times have left their mark on Cuba. In 1993, the low point of what the Cubans call their “Special Period in Time of Peace,” the island lost 30%-50% of its production and 80% of its ability to purchase needed inputs abroad. (Klepak, *Cuba’s Military*, p. 48) Recovery was steady but painfully slow.

The worst is over now. The daily calorie intake of Cuban citizens, which fell dangerously low in the worst moments, has been restored; power blackouts are much less frequent; travel to work is easier. The economy as a whole is in full recovery. Moreover, the crisis was overcome largely through the Cuban people’s own ingenuity and initiative, and without impairing the country’s independence—good reason for pride.

But for Cuba to survive alone in the 1990s, without allies and despite the blockade, it had to grant significant concessions to capitalist investors from abroad and to small-scale entrepreneurs within Cuba. The gates were not opened wide — private capital and foreign trade remained subject to strict government control — but the result was a marked growth in social inequality, particularly between those who had access to dollars and those who did not.

Even in the worst days, Cuba was able to provide subsidized food and housing, free health care and education, to all citizens—a subsistence minimum. But beyond that, workers and their families had to rely on their own wits to get by.

The resulting pressures have been analyzed unsparingly by Cuban government leaders. In November 2005, Castro stated bluntly that “this country can self-destruct ... and it would be our fault.” He stressed the problems of “thievery [of state property], diversion of materials, and money draining away towards the new rich.”

Francisco Soberón Valdés, head of Cuba’s national bank, explained the following month that for a worker today, “the money he earns ... is not enough to buy products that are also necessary but are sold at market [i.e. unsubsidized] prices.”

During the same National Assembly discussion, Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque described how these conditions undercut the socialist principle that “each receives according to their labour,” stimulating tendencies “to individualism, to saving your own skin.”

Under these conditions, said Pérez Roque, “to some degree, historical memory has been lost; a comparative understanding of what is happening in the world has been lost.” Some Cubans “have illusions about capitalism”— a comment that applies particularly to youth who know only the Special Period.

Economic Recovery

For Cuba there is no escape from the pressure of capitalist market forces.

Cuba needs its flourishing world of family-based enterprise—farmers, tradesmen, restaurant operators, and the like. Indeed the Cuban workers' state provides uniquely favourable soil for such initiatives, free of exploitation by capitalist banks, franchisers, and suppliers.

Moreover, to speed its economic recovery, Cuba urgently needs investment capital. Its economic partnership with Venezuela provides an inspiring example of non-exploitative solidarity, but as things stand, most of the potential outside investment is capitalist in nature.

Capitalist investors in Cuba are locked into joint ventures that grant them little freedom of action. Even so, their activity encourages some local managers, technocrats, and Cubans with substantial savings to see their own and their country's future in terms of capitalist, not socialist development. To debate and counter this trend, the Cuban people will need to energetically utilize their popular organizations and democratic institutions.

Three Principles for Survival

In his December 2005 address, Pérez Roque proposed three principles to guide these struggles for the revolution's survival:

1. Leaders must continue to practice "an austere style of life." Their families "must live in a manner no different from the people."
2. The people's support must be maintained "on the basis not of material consumption but of ideas and convictions."
3. "Ultimately the decisive question is who receives the income. The majority, the people? Or the oligarchical minority, the transnationals, the pro-Yankees? Who owns the property: the people, the majority? Or the corrupt minority that serves the interests of the only policeman in the world who can guarantee their privileges in Cuba — Yankee imperialism?"

To this must be added Fidel's promise a month earlier: "This nation will have every one of her citizens living fundamentally on their work and their pensions and retirement income," without having to rely on sideline activities. This is a worthy goal, beyond what even wealthy Canada offers.

Meanwhile, Cuba must confront a U.S. government convinced that given Fidel's illness, the time is ripe to unleash its plans for destabilization, regime change, and conquest.

Given the revolution's evident strength, there are many calls in the U.S. for Washington to shift to a more flexible course. But in past decades, every such effort has shattered against the U.S. rulers' united resolve to overthrow the Cuban government.

Washington has built a massive bureaucracy for this purpose. It has even named its Cuban proconsul-in-waiting: "transition coordinator" Caleb McCarry. A CIA "special advisor" on Cuba and Venezuela reports directly to the president—a distinction otherwise accorded only to Iran and North Korea. Five interagency groups coordinate the Cuban subversion campaign.

This formidable apparatus is now challenged to prove its worth by unleashing provocations against the Cuban government and people that can feed an orchestrated media outcry about “human rights.”

Cuba Stands Firm

In the face of these threats, Raúl Castro’s December 2 address celebrated the unity of the Cuban people, their Revolutionary Armed Forces, and the Cuban Communist Party. This unity, he said, is “our main strategic weapon, which has made it possible for this small island to resist and overcome so many aggressions from imperialism and its allies. This unity provides a basis for the internationalist work of the Cuban people and is the reason for the heroic deeds of its children in other countries around the world, following Marti’s maxim that ‘Homeland is Humanity.’”

The message from Havana is clear: *Cuba stands firm!*

Tens of millions of working people around the world find inspiration in this country that, despite all obstacles, has shown that “another world is possible.”

Socialist Voice #140, December 20, 2006

Cuba Está Firme (español)

En su 50 Aniversario, La Revolución sigue con confianza y creatividad desafiando al Imperio
por John Riddell

Esta es una traducción del artículo "Cuba Stands Firm!" escrito por John Riddell. Se publicó originalmente en la revista marxista digital canadiense Socialist Voice, en su edición Number 139, December 20, 2006. Riddell es co-editor de Socialist Voice y tiene una trayectoria larga desde los años sesenta de militancia en el movimiento de solidaridad con Cuba. La traducción al español es de Amparo Torres.

Por: John Riddell

Miles de invitados internacionales junto a 300.000 cubanos en la Habana, el 2 de diciembre 2006, celebraron el 50 aniversario del nacimiento del ejército revolucionario cubano en lucha contra la dictadura Batista, así como también el 80 cumpleaños de Fidel. Entre ellos estaban tres líderes notables extranjeros: Evo Morales, Presidente de Bolivia, el Presidente electo de Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, y René Préval, Presidente de Haití. Todos ellos recientemente elegidos contra la voluntad del Imperialismo Norteamericano.

El Presidente de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, cuyo gobierno es un estrecho aliado, estaba en casa atendiendo asuntos propios de la elección presidencial que se efectuaría al siguiente día. Cuando se conocieron los resultados, él dedicó su Victoria a la Cuba revolucionaria y a Fidel Castro. Los homenajes del Presidente, en tiempos de levantamiento de luchas populares en toda América Latina, simbolizan un giro en el camino por Cuba. La invencible isla ya no está sola.

Hablando el 2 de Diciembre, el actual Presidente Raúl Castro, reiteró su continuada intransigencia gubernamental. A pesar de la descarada interferencia de Washington, "el movimiento popular y revolucionario toma fuerza a través de toda América Latina, dijo Raúl.

Los Estados Unidos, intentan anexarse América Latina por la vía del Tratado de Libre Comercio de las Américas, (TLC) (FTAA siglas en inglés) Mientras tanto el ALBA, en el esquema de la colaboración económica fraternal respaldada por Cuba, Venezuela y Bolivia, "está tomando su lugar...en beneficio de las masas desposeídas." (Ver discurso de Raúl en <http://wrl.us/raul>. Respecto al ALBA, ver: *Socialist Voice* No. 26.)

Fidel Castro –enfermo-, envió saludos, pero no atendió la celebración. Sin embargo, el espíritu de este evento, y todo lo que ha pasado desde que Fidel se retiró de su puesto gubernamental muestra que la transición a un nuevo equipo de liderazgo no debilita la revolución.

Internacionalismo

Durante los últimos 50 años, la Revolución Cubana ha visto su destino atado a la lucha mundial contra el Imperialismo y por la solidaridad humana. Lo que ha asumido con sus escasos recursos para apoyar estos movimientos. Hoy, las ganancias del movimiento popular en América Latina

está abriendo nuevas perspectivas para Cuba. Y cientos de miles de trabajadores cubanos participan en la ayuda humanitaria al exterior, incluyendo Venezuela, Bolivia, Haití, Timor Oriental, Pakistán y Africa.

Mientras tanto como anoto Raúl, los Estados Unidos, lideran su llamada “cruzada al terrorismo, rodando hacia el inevitable camino de una humillante derrota”.

En América Latina, de acuerdo con Ricardo Alarcón, Presidente de la Asamblea Nacional de Cuba, “la situación actual es mejor que la que los Bolcheviques encontraron”, refiriéndose a la crisis revolucionaria que asoló a Rusia en 1917. (*La Jornada*, Nov.16-06)

A la inversa Cuba ha ayudado a inspirar y formar el despertar latinoamericano.

Alcances

Los logros y la creatividad en Cuba alcanzados en términos de salud, educación, deportes y actividades culturales, en biotecnología (únicos en el tercer mundo) son ampliamente conocidos.

Menos conocido es el éxito en la industria del turismo cubano en construcción de la economía domestica que abastece en dos terceras partes las necesidades de los visitantes desde dentro de la isla, comparado con la norma del 10% – 25% en cualquier otra parte del Caribe. (Hal Klepac, *Cuba's Military*, Págs. 189 –190)

Cuba además ha creado el más exitoso modelo mundial de ayuda humanitaria non-intrusa, que promueve mas -que obstruye- la autonomía y el desarrollo endógeno de las naciones del tercer mundo.

Los cubanos han realizado, la mayor racionalización económica en la industria del azúcar, discutiendo los ajustes propuestos que afectaron a los trabajadores mientras se garantizaba la continuidad del sustento para todos y el apoyo total en las oportunidades educativas.

Cuba ha sido alabada por David Suzuki entre otros, como líder mundial en la producción sustentable y ecológica de alimentos sanos, basada en la garantía a los productores en la seguridad de la tenencia de la tierra.

La fundación World Wildlife, que compila data comparativa de las condiciones ambientales nacionales mundialmente respetada, ha reconocido la anotación de Castro de Diciembre 2/06, que “Cuba es “el único país sobre la tierra que reúne el mínimo de requerimientos para el desarrollo sustentable”. (Ver: <http://xrl.us/wwwfreport>)

El progreso de Cuba en tales campos ha continuado el décimo de 15 años de amarga penuria económica provocada por el colapso de la Unión Soviética y el creciente y agresivo bloqueo de los Estados Unidos que cuestiono la sobre vivencia de la revolución.

Poder de Trabajadores y Campesinos

La fortaleza de la revolución cubana, descansa sobre fuerzas subyacentes:

- Gano y ha mantenido independencia en un área que el Imperialismo norteamericano considero y sigue considerando de su exclusive dominio.
- Ha quebrado el control rígido de los capitalistas cubanos y extranjeros, en prioridad del bienestar del pueblo y no de provecho o beneficio privado.
- Ha construido un ejército, -respaldado por una masiva milicia popular- que es leal al pueblo trabajador cubano y tiene un orgulloso récord de combate anti-imperialista en el exterior.
- Ha comprometido al pueblo trabajador en el ejercicio del poder político, a través de un proceso que Alarcón llama “Parlamentarizacion de la Sociedad.” (Por una discusión plena del orden político de Cuba. Ver: Cuba: A Revolution in Motion, *Socialist Voice* #15.)
- Ha mantenido su lealtad al compromiso del internacionalismo revolucionario a lo largo y ancho de las luchas contra la dominación imperialista y la explotación capitalista.
- Y sobre todo, durante medio siglo ha mantenido un estado basado en la defensa de los intereses de los trabajadores del campo y la ciudad, y tiene abiertamente la perspectiva de avanzar hacia el Socialismo.

50 Años de Desafíos

A pesar de esto, muchos Marxistas y radicales son afilados críticos de Cuba. Sus análisis no se enfocan en los logros cubanos, pero si lo hacen sobre los rasgos que comparte Cuba con la sociedad capitalista. (Ver: *Socialist Voice* #99)

Muchos marxistas además culpan a Cuba por desviación del proyecto democrático de los trabajadores. Se dice que ya fue realizado en la Revolución Rusa, un estandarte al cual –la verdad sea dicha- incluso la temprana Republica Soviética, no dio la talla. Hay alguna validez a tales críticas. Cuba sufre por la explotación de inversores capitalistas y está bajo la enorme presión de las fuerzas del mercado mundial.

Malvadas características capitalistas como la desigualdad social y los prejuicios contra los negros o las mujeres, que han sido bastamente reducidos por la revolución, siguen sobreviviendo en Cuba. Ellos incluso recuperan algún piso bajo las presiones de la crisis económica de los años 1990s.

Por otro lado, el implacable gobierno de los Estados Unidos, conduce campañas para forzar el derrocar del gobierno cubano y distorsiona el orden social y los intentos de Cuba de construir democracia popular, demandando de Cuba que mantenga una postura de plena unidad nacional frente al enemigo externo.

El gobierno cubano justificadamente cree que el país estaría en peligro si diera carta blanca a las “organizaciones de derechos humanos”, o ciertas ONGs, que son de hecho, inspiradas, respaldadas y financiadas por un gobierno de EU que se ha dedicado a subyugar la isla.

Pero al final del análisis, las críticas son extrañas al punto. Cuba no puede alcanzar el socialismo dentro de los confines de una pequeña y subdesarrollada isla. No tiene sentido condenar a Cuba por no alcanzar lo imposible.

Lo que Cuba ha hecho con inigualable éxito, es terminar el dominio político de las clases capitalistas, resistir las presiones económicas del capitalismo, ganar tanto terreno como sea posible para los principios de la solidaridad humana y la producción para cubrir necesidades humanas mas que preferir el lucro y ayudar a abrir la puerta para que otros países en la región tomen el mismo camino.

Esto ha sido reconocido por Noam Chomsky, uno de los críticos de Cuba. “Cuba se ha convertido en símbolo de valerosa resistencia a atacar,” él dice. Bajo las más severas condiciones [cubanos] están haciendo cosas que otros no pueden hacer. El cita “el rol de Cuba en la liberación de Africa. Esto es un logro asombroso.”

Este hecho es ante todo el más fascinante dado que a pesar de los errores, falsos inicios y retrasos, Cuba ha persistido desafiando al Imperialismo y resistiendo la presión capitalista durante cincuenta años.

Ninguna otra revolución en la historia del mundo ha preservado tan bien su vitalidad y creatividad sobre tal periodo de tiempo. Al respecto los alcances de la revolución cubana eclipsan los de la bolchevique, que fue rápidamente dividida y deshecha por una burocracia contrarrevolucionaria.

El Periodo Especial

Aun, los últimos 15 años de duros tiempos han dejado su marca en Cuba. En 1993, el punto mas bajo de lo que los cubanos llaman “periodo especial en tiempos de paz”, la isla perdió el 30% - 50% de su producción y el 80% de su capacidad de compra de importaciones en el exterior. (Klepak, *Cuba's Military*, p.48) la recuperación fue constante pero dolorosamente lenta.

Lo peor está hoy superado. El consumo diario de calorías de los ciudadanos cubanos, que fue peligrosamente bajo en los peores momentos, ha sido restaurado; los cortes de electricidad son mucho menos frecuentes, el transportarse al trabajo es más fácil. La economía como un todo está en plena recuperación. Además, la crisis fue superada en gran parte gracias al ingenio y la iniciativa propia del pueblo cubano, y sin perjudicar la independencia del país. Buena razón para estar orgullosos.

Pero Cuba para sobrevivir sola en los años 90s, sin aliados y a pesar del bloqueo, tuvo que dar significantes concesiones a inversores capitalistas extranjeros y en pequeña escala a empresarios dentro de Cuba. La puerta no fue abierta plenamente al capital privado y al comercio extranjero, se mantuvo sujeta a estricto control gubernamental, pero el resultado fue un marcado crecimiento social de la desigualdad social, particularmente entre los que tenían acceso al dólar y los que no. Inclusive en los peores días, Cuba tuvo la capacidad de proveer alimentos subsidiados y vivienda, servicios de salud y educación gratuitos a todos los ciudadanos –un mínimo de

subsistencia. Pero más que todo, los trabajadores y sus familias confiaron en su propio ingenio para arreglárselas.

La presión resultante tuvo que ser analizada incansablemente por los líderes del gobierno cubano. En Noviembre 2005, Castro estableció sin rodeos que “este país puede autodestruirse... y esto sería nuestra culpa.” Él enfatizó “el hurto [latrocinio de la propiedad del estado], malversación de materiales, y escurrimiento del dinero estatal hacia el nuevo rico.”

Francisco Soberón Valdés, Jefe del Banco Nacional de Cuba, explico el siguiente mes que para un trabajador hoy, “el dinero que gana... no es suficiente para comprar productos que son necesarios, pero son vendidos al precio del mercado” [i.e. no subsidiado].

Durante la misma discusión de la Asamblea Nacional, el Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, Felipe Pérez Roque describió como esas condiciones disminuyeron el principio socialista de “A cada cual según su trabajo” estimulando tendencias “al individualismo, para salvar su propio pellejo”.

Bajo estas condiciones, dijo Pérez Roque, “en algún grado la memoria histórica se ha perdido, una comprensión comparativa de lo que está pasando en el mundo ha perdido.” Algunos cubanos tienen ilusiones acerca del capitalismo”. –un comentario que se aplica particularmente a jóvenes que conocen solo el periodo especial. (Para ver resumen completo de la declaración del líder cubano, sobre Los Desafíos que Enfrenta la Revolución Hoy. (Ver *Socialist Voice* No. 67, No. 69 y No. 73.)

Recuperación Económica

Para Cuba no hay escape a la presión de las fuerzas del mercado capitalista.

Cuba necesita su florecimiento del mundo de la familia, -basado en empresa-, los comerciantes, operadores de restaurantes, en lo posible. En resumen el estado de los trabajadores cubanos, proporciona el único suelo favorable para tales iniciativas, libre de la explotación de los bancos capitalistas, franquisiadores y abastecedores.

Por otra parte, por la velocidad de su recuperación económica, Cuba necesita urgentemente inversión de capital. Su asociación económica con Venezuela otorga un inspirado ejemplo de solidaridad sin explotación, pero como las cosas están en su lugar, la mayoría del potencial externo en inversiones es capitalista en su naturaleza. Los inversionistas capitalistas en Cuba están atrapados en la aventura conjunta que les concede poca libertad de acción. Incluso, su actividad alienta algunos administradores locales, tecnócratas y cubanos con ahorros substanciales a mirar su propio futuro y el de su país en términos de capitalismo, y no de desarrollo socialista. En debatir y contrarrestar esta tendencia, el pueblo cubano necesitara utilizar energéticamente sus organizaciones populares y democráticas.

Tres Principios para Sobrevivir

En Diciembre 2005, Pérez Roque, propuso tres principios como guía de la lucha por la sobre vivencia de la revolución:

1. Los líderes deben continuar en la práctica de “un estilo de vida austero”. Sus familias “deben vivir de una manera no diferente a la del pueblo”.
2. El respaldo del pueblo debe ser mantenido “no sobre las bases del consumo material, sino sobre la base de las ideas y convicciones”.
3. “Finalmente, la pregunta decisiva es: ¿Quién recibe el ingreso, las mayorías, el pueblo o la minoría oligárquica, las transnacionales, los pro-yanquis? – ¿Quiénes son los dueños de la propiedad, las mayorías, o los corruptos minoritarios que sirven a los intereses del único policía del mundo que puede garantizar sus privilegios en Cuba –imperialismo Yanqui?”

A esto debe adicionarse la promesa de Fidel del mes anterior; “Esta nación tendrá a cada ciudadano viviendo fundamentalmente de su trabajo y de sus ingresos de pensionados o jubilados, sin tener que confiar en actividades marginales. Esta es una valiosa meta, inclusive mas que lo que ofrece la acaudalada Canadá a sus ciudadanos.

Al mismo tiempo Cuba debe confrontar al gobierno de los Estados Unidos convencido que la enfermedad de Fidel le da el tiempo propicio para ejecutar sus planes de desestabilización para el cambio de régimen y la conquista.

Dada la evidente fortaleza de la revolución, hay muchos llamados en los Estados Unidos a Washington por un cambio de actitud o un curso más flexible. Pero en pasadas décadas cada uno de estos esfuerzos se han estrellado contra los gobernantes unificados en la determinación de derrocar al gobierno cubano.

Washington ha construido una burocracia masiva para estos propósitos. Incluso nombro su “Cuban proconsul-in-waiting” (procónsul cubano -en espera):”coordinador en transición”, Mister Caleb McCarry. Un asesor especial en Cuba y Venezuela reporta directamente al presidente – una distinción exclusiva acordada solo para Irán y Corea del Norte; Cinco grupos inter-agencias coordinados por la campaña subversión cubana.

Este formidable aparato ahora tiene que probar su validez lanzando provocaciones contra el gobierno cubano y gente que puede alimentar una orquestada protesta en la prensa acerca de “Los Derechos humanos”.

Cuba Está Firme

Frente a estas amenazas, el 2 de diciembre de 2006, Raúl Castro, saludo la unidad del pueblo cubano, sus Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias y al Partido Comunista Cubano. Esta unidad, - dijo- es “nuestra mas grande arma estratégica, que ha hecho posible a esta pequeña isla resistir y vencer muchas agresiones del Imperialismo y sus aliados.

Esta unidad otorga bases al trabajo internacionalista del pueblo cubano y es razón de los hechos heroicos de sus hijos en otros países alrededor del mundo, siguiendo las enseñanzas de Martí: “La Patria es Humanidad”.

El mensaje de la Habana es claro. ¡Cuba está Firme! Decenas de millones de trabajadores alrededor del mundo encuentran inspiración en este país que a pesar de todos los obstáculos, ha demostrado que “otro mundo es posible.”