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Socialist Voice #234, March 3, 2008

Masters of Greenwash: B.C.'s Carbon Tax Is No Answer to Climate Change

By Roger Annis

Vancouver, British Columbia — When it comes to the greenwashing of politics, no government in Canada can equal the Liberal Party government here, headed by Premier Gordon Campbell.

Last year, Campbell made a much ballyhooed announcement that his government intended to legislate a 33% reduction in carbon emissions by the year 2020 and aim for an 80% reduction by 2050. No plan for how to achieve these lofty goals accompanied the announcement, and the province's residents are still waiting for one.

In a budget released on February 19, the government announced a new "carbon tax" that now occupies centre-stage of its carbon reduction goals. The province becomes the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce such a tax. It will penalize users of fossil fuels with a levy of \$10 per ton of carbon emissions, eventually rising to \$30 per ton. For gasoline, that means an initial tax of 2½ cents per litre.

Billions for roads, ports, fossil fuel

The government's emissions reduction goals are laughable because everything it is doing ensures that they will never be reached.

Shortly after the Liberals were first elected in 2001, they abolished the province's environment ministry, cutting 1,000 jobs. One of its functions was to monitor violations of pollution laws and prosecute offenders.

The same budget that introduced the carbon tax gives tax breaks to oil and gas companies to boost exploration and production. And several of the most polluting industries in the province are exempt, including production of natural gas, cement, and aluminium.

The B.C. and Canadian governments are charging ahead with huge expansions of two shipping ports in the province —Vancouver and Prince Rupert. These will facilitate the export of fossil fuels and the import of manufactured goods to markets across North America. The movement of ships is one of the largest emitters of carbon dioxide and other pollutants. The port expansions necessarily require more associated roads and railways.

The Vancouver part of this plan, the “Gateway Program,” will spend more than \$5 billion on port and rail expansion and a huge extension of bridges and highways in the metropolitan region. A significant movement of opposition has sprung up, but so far both governments are sticking to their guns.

No answer on public transit

Another target of the provincial government’s greenwashing is public transit. In January, it announced it would add \$14 billion to transit spending across the province by 2011.

Public transit in the Vancouver region is woefully inadequate. Service cannot keep up with demand, and fares are rising sharply. Rail lines that could be used for transit sit idle. Bus travel is crowded and inadequate. Successive governments in B.C. have invested in an overhead rapid transit system called “skytrain” that provides inferior service and starves the transit system of funding for less costly and more functional technologies such as light rail and buses.

Most of the announced \$14 billion will go towards more skytrains. Construction of a third skytrain line began several years ago in order to reach the Vancouver airport in time for the 2010 Winter Olympics. It will cost at least \$2 billion, more than \$100 million per kilometre. Without a broad, effective rebuilding of the entire transit system, this massive spending on skytrain will not reduce automobile travel by any appreciable amount.

The carbon tax fits the policy pattern of provincial governments in Canada that have engineered a massive shift in the taxation system, away from progressive income tax and in favour of regressive consumption taxes. This has been accompanied by massive reductions in taxation of corporate profits.

Nowadays in British Columbia, everything is up for greenwash. One of the measures in the latest budget is elimination of a tax on the income of financial institutions operating in the province. This tax was originally introduced some years ago in response to the obscene profits they were earning. The *Vancouver Sun* editorialized on February 23 that the removal of the tax, “should unburden the financial services sector, which employs about 27,000 British Columbians in clean, green jobs.” This would be the “sector” whose financing work will facilitate expansion of fossil fuel exploration and extraction, road expansion, etc.

Liberal environmentalists endorse the greenwash

More road building, continued subsidies to corporate polluters, inadequate plans for transit expansion, rising consumption taxes that hit the poor the hardest — this doesn’t sound like much of a “green” plan for the future of British Columbia, or the world. Despite that, some liberal environmentalists in B.C. have welcomed the government’s plans.

Kevin Washbrook, director of Voters Taking Action on Climate Change, says the carbon tax is “good news.” He told the weekly *Georgia Straight* that the tax should be \$30 per ton from the get-go, instead of the miserly \$10 per ton.

“They’re building a good track record,” commented Lisa Matthaus of the Sierra Club of Canada.

Ian Bruce of the Suzuki Foundation called the transit plan “a good step forward,” and said the carbon tax will promote development of green technologies and make B.C. an environmental leader.

Labour needs to revisit positions

The farce unfolding in British Columbia demonstrates the need for an independent and forceful campaign on the climate change crisis, one that places the onus on those who caused the problem in the first place — greedy corporations and compliant governments. Trade unions and associated political movements should be taking a lead.

But the labour movement’s record to date is pretty abysmal. The New Democratic Party and most unions supported the bid for the 2010 Olympics, a greenhouse gas-generating monster if every there was one. They also supported the airport skytrain line boondoggle. For years they have watched in silence as paper and wood products companies have destroyed the province’s forests with clearcutting and other environmentally destructive practices.

But fresh winds are blowing within labour on climate issues, creating new openings to revisit past positions and deepen a debate over the future.

Eliminating the pollution threat to humanity and the rest of the earth’s biosystem requires a fundamental shift in how the world’s economy is organized. The profit drive and the belief that the earth’s resources are unlimited must be replaced with a planned economy that both meets human social and cultural needs *and* strictly respects humanity’s dependence on a healthy biosphere.

An important step in this direction is establishing free and effective public transit. The unelected board of directors that runs Vancouver’s transit system represents the interests of companies that profit from the movement of goods, real estate interests that make a killing along the routes of rapid transit lines, and construction companies that have an interest in having cumbersome and expensive technologies adopted.

Summing up in fine style a capitalist’s approach to public transit, federal government finance minister James Flaherty recently explained why his government is providing funding to Vancouver for skytrain expansion: “It’s about reducing traffic congestion so goods can get to market on time.”

Public transit should be about creating a better society and eliminating the killer pollution caused by cars and trucks. It should be organized by elected bodies that represent ordinary citizens. Their job is to meet people’s need for cheap, comfortable and effective transportation.

Consumption taxes like the B.C. government's carbon tax cannot solve the earth's looming environmental calamity. They punish the poorest people in society for the follies and excesses of the wealthiest.

Climate change writer and activist Ian Angus explained in a recent article why carbon taxes won't stop greenhouse gas emissions: "So long as corporations are free to invest as they see fit, any carbon tax that is high enough to be effective will lead to capital flight, not to investment in new technology." If carbon taxes are to be part of an effective anti-emissions policy, he says, "they must be coupled with broadscale economic planning and a determined effort to shut down the Alberta tar sands and other major emitters."

In a recent article in the online journal, *Climate and Capitalism*, Angus proposed six steps to reduce carbon emissions:

- *Unilaterally* adopt and implement the emission reduction targets proposed by the experts in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: 25%-40% below 1990 levels by 2020, and 50%-85% by 2050.
- Instead of carbon taxes and carbon exchange schemes, impose hard limits on the emissions produced by the largest resource and energy companies.
- Stop all expansion of the tar sands — and then shut them down quickly.
- Redirect military spending and the federal budget surplus into public energy-saving projects such as expanding mass transit and retrofitting homes and office buildings. Tar sands workers and redeployed soldiers can play key roles in this effort.
- Recognize Canada's ecological debt to the Third World and to indigenous peoples. Clean up the damage that Canada's capitalists have caused, provide assistance in adapting to climate change, and transfer the resources and technology needed for clean economic development.

Socialist Voice #235, March 14, 2008

Resisting the University: Students for a Democratic Society at the University of British Columbia

One of the most promising developments among Canadian social movements this year is the emergence of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. SDS's bold and imaginative actions have won it wide support in the student body. In the following article, SDS member Jasmine Rezaee outlines the group's program for transforming the university.

By Jasmine R. Rezaee

To effectively resist the commercialization of public space and the corporatization and militarization of education, students at the University of British Columbia (UBC) created a political group in the summer of 2007 called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). SDS-UBC consists of students who are unafraid to use direct-action to enact radical social change. We actively resist the corporate and military funding of our education, and we believe that students should have a meaningful role in the decision-making processes at the university.

From March 3-7, 2008 SDS hosted a "Resisting the University" conference. Our conference contained sixteen different events ranging from panels and speakers to protests and TrekPark 2.0 building sessions (a campaign to reclaim park space on the campus). Our keynote guest speakers were professors David Noble from York University in Toronto and Denis Rancourt from the University of Ottawa. We had panels about the corporatization of the university, grad student apathy, militarization of education, academic freedom, critical pedagogy, the gentrification of our campus/city, the history of activism at UBC and Vancouver, and discussions about the governance structures at UBC.

A highlight of the week of activity included an opening speech by David Noble. He proclaimed a radical epistemology of knowledge through action and insisted that students must fight the university from outside its bureaucratic structure. Noble lambasted the tenureship process, the complacency of faculty, the corporatization of education, and the power-dynamics that structure the classroom and student-teacher relations. He proclaimed that the future is not pre-determined and that it is up to students, activists, and young people more generally to create a better university and society.

Another important event that occurred was our protest held on the day of UBC's 100 year anniversary. A large SDS and sympathizers contingent marched through the Student Union Building, Brock Hall (UBC's financial hub), and occupied the Old Administration building. We barged into a UBC executive meeting and seriously frightened a group of predominantly white males in business suits. We ate their food (a fancy buffet), screamed at them through a megaphone and put the unelected, Liberal government-appointed Board of Governors member

Stephen Owen under severe heat! We also went to the president's office and chanted "1,2,3,4 we're knocking on your office door" but he never came out (the coward!).

After occupying the Old Administration Building, we went to our campus library and protested the presence of a huge, newly-erected military mural. Finally, we barged into a construction site and halted work for a while.

Our Week of Resistance was an important consciousness-raising experience. A reoccurring theme throughout the conference was the responsibility for social change that we carry as students and members of society.

Another theme that emerged in our conference was the hegemonic fear that renders faculty politically impotent. A milieu of fear and timidity has been bred due to:

- a) the rise of sessional teachers, who constitute a flexible, underpaid university proletariat;*
- b) the increasing difficulty in obtaining tenure; and*
- c) the tenure process, which is designed to ensure the complacency and capitulation of faculty.*

The fear of being fired or denied tenure often prevents faculty from including more critical perspectives in the classroom and discussing issues that may be deemed "controversial" by the university establishment. This curtails academic freedom and seriously hampers the development of critical thinking skills within the student body.

Each panel and discussion at our conference reminded us that there are many issues which are not discussed in the classroom but that directly shape the content and availability of courses. For example, because neoliberal or capitalist/profit-driven forces are engulfing the university, departments that don't exist to generate a profit, like women and gender's studies, or arts courses more generally, obtain increasingly diminished funding, limiting the availability of courses and the quality of research from these departments.

Some concrete issues that came out of Resisting the University which SDS-UBC hopes to realize:

- Banning military recruitment at UBC.
- Banning military funding for the Arts and Sciences (eg from the Security and Defence Forum of the Canadian military).
- Stopping the rise of sessional teachers by changing the university's hiring policies.
- Changing the tenure process so that it breeds less fear, conservatism and complacency.
- Stopping commercial development on campus: affordable student, staff and faculty housing only!
- Equalizing the allocation of funds so that departments that don't exist to generate a profit secure adequate funding for quality research and permanent staff.

- Pressuring the provincial government to better fund post-secondary education.
- No more Tuition Fees! Zero student debt and zero fees to ensure the university is accessible to all.
- Transforming UBC's governance structures into more transparent, representative and accountable bodies by empowering the Senate; jettisoning appointed seats; allowing students to easily place an item on the Board of Governors agenda; and eliminating corporate presence on the Board.
- An official acknowledgement that UBC is built on stolen land and that the Coast Salish, and the Musqueam people in particular, have a right to it.
- Coalition building among sessionals, faculty, and other activists organizations to realize these goals.

The university should not be a vocational school. It should not be a place where people obtain a few skills to qualify them for a specific occupation in the capitalist economy. The university should be a revolutionary place where students learn the language of critique and dissent and develop critical thinking skills that will enable them to engage with other members of society in a socially and politically relevant manner. To realize this aim, SDS will continue to resist and concretely act to achieve each of the above mentioned goals.

Jasmine R. Rezaee is a member of Students for a Democratic Society at UBC. For more information on SDS, go to the SDS website. While there, check out the SDS monthly newspaper, The Knoll.

Socialist Voice #236, March 18, 2008

Venezuela Responds to World Food Crisis

Programs provide land, aid to working farmers

By John Riddell and Suzanne Weiss

Suzanne and John are members of the Venezuela We Are With You Coalition. The following are major portions of a presentation they made to members of the National Farmers Union in Grey County, Ontario, March 10, 2007.

The people of Venezuela are today campaigning to rebuild a devastated family farm economy. They have more problems than solutions, but still are making significant progress.

Venezuela is an oil-rich country. But that doesn't mean that Venezuelans are rich: in poor countries, oil brings misfortune. The so-called free market ensured that oil exports were balanced by a flood of cheap imports that stunted Venezuelan manufacturing and devastated its agriculture.

So despite the oil, Venezuela remained poor – its income per person is about one-fifth of Canada's. And a rich minority gets most of it; 65% live in desperate poverty. Over half, unable to get jobs, scrape by in what is called the “informal economy.”

For ‘holistic rural development’

When Hugo Chávez was elected as Venezuela's president in 1998, only a fraction of Venezuela's once flourishing farming sector was left. There were fewer than 300,000 farm families, and many of them were doing little farming. Much of its richest farmland was no longer utilized. Much was being held idle in huge estates. Agriculture made up only 6% of national production – extremely low for a country so rich in farming potential and so poor in industrial development. Three-quarters of Venezuela's food was imported.

Soon after the election, the Venezuelan people adopted a new constitution that addressed this problem in terms not just of raising farm production but of rebuilding rural communities. It declares:

“The state will promote conditions for holistic rural development guaranteeing the farming population an adequate level of wellbeing, as well as their incorporation into national development.”

The government stated in 2004 that farming is “the basic foundation for the preservation of a culture” and of “a way of life.” (“ALBA and Food Security,” Bancoex, February 5)

It is government policy to promote family farming as the best way to achieve this cultural goal and as the most efficient form of agriculture.

In Venezuela, 5% of landowners hold three-quarters of the land. The constitution deplores this situation, declaring that “the predominance of large estates is contrary to the national interest.” President Chávez explains this with a biblical quotation from the prophet Isaiah: “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.”

As Venezuela sees it, reliance on food imports endangers the security of its food supply.

Venezuelan farmers cannot compete with highly subsidized U.S. exports, and with the big lead that U.S. agriculture has developed in technology and infrastructure, but attempts to protect producers are denounced as attacks on “free trade.”

Meanwhile, the predatory tactics of a handful of corporate giants are making farmers “more and more dependent on the purchase of expensive inputs of transnational companies.” (Bancoex)

Land reform

The heart of Venezuela’s agricultural program is a land reform that aims to distribute idle land to small farmers or farming cooperatives, using both state-owned land and expropriated portions of private estates with compensation.

The reform is moderate, leaving untouched large estates that are in production. Yet it has led to a wave of violence in the countryside. Assassins in the pay of large landowners have killed almost 200 farm activists. The reform has also met with obstruction from government bureaucrats, judges, and police.

Farmers, who face lawless, chaotic conditions in the countryside, receive weak legal and police support. Infrastructure is lacking – for example, the rural road system is very poor, so it is hard to market products. State officials appointed under the old regime are often unhelpful.

Nonetheless, by 2004, 125,000 families had received inalienable title to four million acres – often land they were already cultivating – and there’s been much progress since.

Many of the new farms are independent family enterprises; others are cooperatives, and there’s a full-time training program for those who are joining or forming new co-ops. Producer co-ops are mostly small and often family-based. There are also co-ops that process or transport food.

Close to \$1 billion a year has been invested in agricultural development. Low-interest loans have been provided to small farmers. And food production has increased in each of the last three years – 12% in all.

Meanwhile, the government has moved to counter hunger among the poor. It slapped price controls on basic foods. A new network of 14,000 state-run groceries stores, called Mercal, provides cut-rate food in poor districts, and another network of 6,000 community-run kitchens, using donated space and labour, provides free meals each day to a million of Venezuela’s neediest.

A visit with Venezuelan farmers

While we were in Venezuela in November and December, we met residents of the town of Libertador, in the state of Caribobo, who had taken up farming on idle land.

We met Maria Morillo, president of a communal government formed by about 200 farm families living in a hill district called Mont Vernont. She told a dramatic story. In the early days of the Bolivarian government, she and her neighbours had occupied an idle farm, refused to accept the landlord's eviction order, fought off an armed attack by his thugs (two farmers were wounded), and finally won title under the land reform law.

Mont Vernont farmers set up communal councils in each of the area's 14 hamlets, which in Venezuela have authority to decide on and administrate local improvements. They worked to bring in health, electricity, schooling, and other services.

Mont Vernont is famous in Liberator for the success of its first electrification project. The farmers got funds to wire up one of their hamlets. By working some angles and contributing some free labour, they managed to stretch the money to cover electrifying not one but three hamlets. Such community control means cheap government.

As president, Maria visits the 14 communities to check on progress. She goes on foot and can reach three hamlets in a day. In these isolated rural communities, everything cries out for action. We reached another mountain farming community, Las Vegas del Torrito, by the worst road we've ever seen. At one point it dived into a gully and splashed across a stream, obviously passable only in dry weather and only by a truck or four-wheel-drive. Garbage was burning in piles by the side of the road.

There are 23 farm families in Las Vegas. The communal council decided to put human needs before issues such as roads and garbage. Their first project was a community building—a classroom, meeting room, and consulting area for a visiting Cuban doctor. A school is under construction. They have council assemblies every two weeks with attendance of between 40 and 100.

Bureaucratic obstruction

We also found in Libertador several examples of the obstruction farmers face from a conservative state bureaucracy.

There are small hog raising operations in the municipality, which generate manure that threatens local water supplies. The local government developed a solution: septic tanks that would eliminate pollution and odor while generating gas that can be burned for cooking. But the project was quashed by the ministry of the environment, on the grounds of zoning regulations.

There had been other incidents of this sort, like a ministry ban against construction of ponds where small farmers could raise trout.

What explanations do the ministry provide? "None whatsoever," says Libertador mayor Argenis Loreto. "Just as we always say: this bureaucracy is eating us alive... We can't change things

with this type of state.... I'd like to dissolve the municipal administration and create a confederation of community governments.”

Battling shortages

During our visit, many basic food items were in short supply, especially in the Mercal stores. The shortages were causing discontent.

Partly, this reflects the success of efforts to improve living standards of working people. Venezuela's poor now have more money in hand (more than double, by one estimate), and they are buying food at subsidized prices. They are eating better. Demand for milk has risen 50% in eight years. By another measure, demand for food rose by more than a third in three years.

Corruption is also a factor. Some subsidized food was being diverted from the Mercals and sold privately.

Market forces make matters worse. Scare tactics by the right-wing media have encouraged panic buying. Importers brought in too little food. Distributors resisted price controls by hoarding. Large amounts of food – often subsidized food – were being smuggled out of the country.

Public exasperation was increased by the fact that these problems were all foreseeable.

In recent months, the government has responded decisively. Price controls and import restrictions have been eased. Funds have been allocated to reinvigorate and expand the Mercal chain. Mercal stores have been placed under community control. Most importantly, a large state-owned food distributor has been established to import food on a massive scale for the Mercal network.

World food crisis

President Chávez believes that the food shortages in Venezuela are also symptoms of a looming crisis of supply on a world scale. He recently quoted an article from Canada's *National Post* (January 7, 2008), reporting a speech by a Bank of Montreal investment expert. “A new crisis is emerging, a global food catastrophe,” the expert said. Raw food prices are up 22% in a year. Corn prices are up 44%. The U.S. produces more than half the world's corn, and its exports are expected to shut off in three years.

Two dozen companies control world food supplies, says the bank's expert.

Chávez identifies three causes of world food shortage, all of them hard to reverse.

1. An increase in world demand, particularly for meat and dairy.
2. A decline in yields, caused by global warming.
3. “George Bush's crazy plan to use food to make gasoline.”

Massive investment

The answer? In Chávez's words, "With the grace of God, we will make Venezuela a powerhouse of food production." Venezuela aims to increase cattle herds 50% in four years; to increase food production 2½ times over. The pace of government investment in agriculture has been stepped up greatly.

Many new socially owned food processing plants are being opened under community control. For example, on January 10, 2008, Chávez opened a milk processing centre, one of the largest in Latin America, in the state of Zulia. The centre's history is typical of many of these projects. It began 47 years ago and was government-owned until 1995. Then it was then sold to an Italian firm, Parmalat, which ran it into the ground. The plant lay idle until the government repurchased it last year.

Zulia is an important cattle-raising area, and the plant will help local dairy farmers market their product. But it takes more than a single plant to create a healthy environment for farming.

Alongside the milk plant, Chávez announced an array of measures for Zulia's farmers:

- A centre for genetic support of livestock herds.
- A meatpacking plant.
- A branch of the government's Agrarian Bank, providing low-interest loans to farmers.
- The rebuilding of 226 kilometers of rural roads.
- Creating of a rural planning district, which will implement an integrated plan for supply of electricity, water, schools, health, security, and other services.

Such socially owned processing plants can fit into a farm marketing system that cuts out the profiteering private food monopolies. Small farmers get preference in sales to the socially owned processing plants, whose product can be passed on to the state distributor, and then to the Mercal community grocery, and finally to the consumer.

Venezuela's agricultural efforts are also expressed internationally through its alliance with other countries that seek a path independent of U.S. control – an alliance called ALBA (Spanish for "dawn"). One result of this cooperation that we saw is a large vegetable garden in downtown Caracas – a demonstration site that was established with help from Cuba.

A massive challenge

Farmers in Venezuela, as in Canada, are aging. The young generation is mostly in the cities and has mostly lost touch with its farming roots. Venezuela needs to persuade tens of thousands of young people to return to the land. How will this be possible?

It will take more than economic support. For farming to flourish, it needs a rich rural culture. But this is Venezuela, where farmers cannot easily get a truck or tractor, let alone satellite TV and Internet. How can such needs be met in a poor country, with urgent problems on every side crying out for solution?

What's more, the country is locked in conflict and threatened with attack from abroad, and the very survival of the social experiment led by Chávez is in question. Farmers cannot always count on the sympathy of government bureaucrats or police. And Zulia, where Chávez opened the milk processing plant, is often hit by right-wing violence initiated by paramilitary gangs that cross the border from neighboring Colombia.

So it won't be surprising if Venezuela finds it difficult to achieve the high goals it has set for the expansion of food production. But its people deserve credit for setting the right tasks and tackling them with energy.

Support for small-scale farmers and rebuilding of family farming is an urgent priority worldwide. In this struggle, farmers in Canada share a common interest with the popular movement led by Hugo Chávez and with Venezuelan farmers.

Socialist Voice #237, March 21, 2008

Ontario Jails First Nation Leaders; KI Pledges to Continue the Struggle

On March 18, six members of the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) First Nation were sentenced to six months in jail for contempt of court, for opposing mining company operations on their traditional lands in Northwestern Ontario. The imprisoned leaders include the majority of members of the KI Band Council.

This follows similar contempt of court sentences against activists from the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, near Kingston Ontario, for blocking uranium mining operations on their land.

The following statement was issued on March 20 by the KI Council.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib, Ontario – We are saddened today that our leaders have been jailed for contempt and they're there for what they strongly believe – to protect Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) Homelands!

As a result of our community assembly on March 18, 2008, the present Chief and Council notably, Chief Donny Morris, Deputy Chief Jack McKay, Head Councillor Cecilia Begg, Councillors Samuel McKay and Darryl Sainnawap are still our leaders and are deemed equivalent as leaders in exile as expressed by the people of Kitchenuhmaykoosib. One band member, Bruce Sakakeep is also in jail for contempt as well.

The remaining Council members Susan Nanokeesic, Kenny Martin and Angus McKay are still politically active at the community level with the assistance of a working group consisting of 18 community members.

With consultation between the exiled Council members and the Council in Kitchenuhmaykoosib, we take strong stand on the following:

- 1. No Parliamentarian, be it federal or provincial member, is allowed in the Homelands of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug;*
- 2. No more free entry to Kitchenuhamaykoosib lands by Platinex or any other mining entity including First Nation mining companies;*
- 3. Ongoing blockade will be more protected and secured in order to protect our KI Homelands;*
- 4. Assembly of First Nations must abandon the partnership agreements with the mining industry in Canada;*
- 5. All First Nation political territorial organizations in Ontario do not speak directly for or on behalf of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, but their support on the issue is welcome;*

6. Ontario must respond to our proposal made with our brothers and sisters of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, to establish a joint panel on mining on First Nations lands.

There is suspicion and fear on our part as a result of the court's disposition on our leaders. There is no more sense of safety and well being for all Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug to rely on the Canadian government's legal and statutory obligations on our people, especially the government of Ontario. The court document and its disposition gives us anxiety and terror for we are all distressed enough with our present social and economic situation.

The court ruling is a deliberate attack on the blood, bone and spirit of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug. It referenced many cases and ancient views of "rule of law" that we don't agree with it. The mention of "Magna Carta" is no exception. Ontario uses it to make a false disposition on our people. The remnants of Magna Carta did indeed killed off many Indigenous peoples in both South and North Americas. The principle of that no one is above the law is hypocritical as displayed by the government of Ontario!

The Ontario emissary, Mr. Michael Bryant came to our community and offered no formal agenda and plan for negotiations. There was no real substance for negotiations despite what he said in a press release dated March 17, 2008. Unfortunately, this is the day that our leaders were imprisoned. The Ontario emissary Mr. Bryant is indeed speaking fork-tongued, repeated once again as Treaty Commissioners did back in 1929. He is not formally talking to anyone at KI as he professes to be!

KI Council along with our brothers and sisters at Ardoch Algonquin First Nation who are facing similar situation jointly submitted a proposal to Ontario outlining moratorium on exploration and mining in the disputed areas; a joint panel to consist three-party membership to investigate exploration and mining issues; and to negotiate interim measures agreement. Mr. Bryant did not take our proposal seriously and he will not even mention any of the contents described.

We are very thankful for those that supported us from the beginning and we still need your support more than ever. With your ongoing support, KI will prevail.

For additional information see the websites of the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug and Ardoch Algonquin First Nations.

KI is urging supporters of these political prisoners to contribute the Ardoch defense fund. Cheques payable to "Chris Reid In Trust for Ardoch Algonquin First Nation" should be mailed to: Christopher M. Reid, Barrister & Solicitor, [address]

Socialist Voice #238, March 23, 2008

Venezuela: “The PSUV is born, destined to make history”

By Federico Fuentes

(Green Left Weekly, March 14, 2008)

(CARACAS) Addressing the founding congress of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) on March 2, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez proclaimed the new party to be “a party for the social battle, for the defense of the homeland.”

“If the homeland, the revolution were ... attacked in a direct manner by the empire or its lackeys, each militant of this party should become a revolutionary soldier ...”

“The PSUV is born, destined to make history,” Chavez said of the party whose creation he called for in December 2006 to unite the various groups and mass base among the poor that support the revolution. “Its fundamental role is to be ... the biggest guarantee of [the revolution’s] permanence.”

That same weekend, 1,600 delegates at the founding congress approved the program and declaration of principles of the new party. The previous weekend Chavez was elected president of the party and the congress granted him the power to appoint five vice presidents, the first of which is retired General Alberto Muller Rojas.

Then on March 9, over 90,000 spokespeople, alternative spokespeople and the five heads of commissions elected from each of the more than 12,000 battalions (branches) participated in the election for the 15-person national directorate, as well as 15 alternative delegates to that body.

Political necessity

Speaking to *Green Left Weekly*, Muller Rojas explained that “the party was a political necessity” for Venezuela’s revolutionary process.

A veteran revolutionary, Muller Rojas headed Chavez’s successful 1998 presidential campaign. Muller Rojas was appointed to the technical commission to help create the PSUV when it was first initiated.

Describing Chavez’s old party, the Movement of the Fifth Republic (MVR), as an “electoral club with diverse interests,” Muller stated that until now “no structured force, with clearly marked out political objectives [and] which united” all pro-Chavez forces had existed in the revolution.

Between April and June of 2007, some 5.7 million people signed up to join the new party, an expression of popular enthusiasm for a political instrument to serve the revolution. Local battalions were created, with delegates from every 7-12 battalions coming together to form socialist circumscriptions (districts). From these circumscriptions the delegates to the founding congress were elected.

Expressing satisfaction with the founding congress, Muller Rojas remarked that “you cannot construct a party in one year — we have a multitude of 5.7 million people who enrolled in the party and it will take years to build such a party, particularly due to the lack of political culture, after 40 or 50 years of the exclusion of the majority from politics.”

Debates and tensions

The congress, which began on January 12, was marked by a number of debates and tensions. Chavez, citing Fidel Castro, stated in his March 2 speech that the party was “the revolution within the revolution.”

The party has become a central battleground for the future of the revolution, as the grassroots attempt to impose its will on bureaucratic and right-wing sectors it feels are holding back the revolution.

Regarding the debate at the congress that occurred over whether to explicitly define the party as not only anti-imperialist (as the right wing attempted to limit the program to) but also anti-capitalist, Muller Rojas expressed his satisfaction that the congress had adopted a “definitive position against capitalism.”

Other debates flared up over the supposed expulsion from the PSUV of National Assembly deputy Luis Tascon after he publicly raised allegations of corruption in the infrastructure ministry.

Although the congress never voted on his expulsion, two central leaders of the congress organizing committee, Jorge Rodriguez and Diosdado Cabello (governor of Miranda, a leader of the Chavista right and brother of the former infrastructure minister implicated in Tascon’s allegations) announced on state television he had been expelled.

Discontent among delegates forced a backdown, with the question of Tascon’s expulsion deferred until after the congress.

There were also widespread concerns raised over the conduct of the congress, specifically the election process for the leadership of the party.

A letter to Chavez signed by a significant number of congress delegates argued it was necessary to “profoundly revise the internal processes that during the founding congress have unfolded and which we feel makes vulnerable democratic participation, transparency, internal unity, the confidence of militants, the image of the party in the country and the international community.”

Gonzalo Gomez, a delegate from Caracas working-class barrio Catia and member of Socialist Tide (a collection of left militants in the PSUV) argued that although these issues were problematic, they were understandable in the context of the short time available to found the party and the urgency of the task.

These criticisms, he explained, need to be taken into consideration for bettering the internal processes of the party in the future.

Regarding the Tascon dispute, Gomez argued that besides the need to have first established the program and principles as a basis for who can and can't be a member, as well statutes to define a democratic procedure for expulsions, the real question is: "What is the biggest danger for the revolution? That people carry out actions outside of the framework of the discipline of the organization, or is the biggest danger that of the violations of the principles and ethics of the party, and the existence of corruption within the revolution, the state and the government?"

Battling bureaucracy

Following a strong campaign by delegates, the declaration of principles was amended to include the following paragraph: "The inefficiency in the exercise of public power, bureaucratism, the low level of participation of the people in the control and management of government, corruption and a widening gap between the people and government, threaten [to undermine] the trust that the people have placed in the Bolivarian revolution."

Drawing on the lessons of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky — a bitter opponent of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union under Stalin — Muller Rojas added that the biggest danger the party faced was bureaucratism.

He argued this "tends to create a new class, make party life much more rigid, where the party loses flexibility and where what happens is what happened to the party in the USSR."

This is more dangerous than the attacks from imperialism and the counter-revolution, Muller Rojas argued.

Asked about differences within the party, Muller Rojas said: "I personally see tendencies as something very positive. I don't believe in the idea of single thought nor dogmatic thought." He added that given the great majority of aspiring PSUV members don't come from the old parties of the left, there has not yet been the creation of organized currents or factions.

The great diversity of the party was reflected in the election of the national leadership, he added. "There we have everything — afro-descendants, indigenous, whites, youth with different ideological positions."

In the elections "people did not follow the slates that had been circulating supposedly representing different tendencies," Gonzalo said. "In regards to the national leadership, we could say that neither the most radical sectors nor the most conservative sectors were elected."

Forged in the midst of a revolutionary process, the PSUV has some enormous tasks ahead.

"We are the government and the government is the party," said Muller Rojas. "It is an intimate relationship. It is not just an external support to the government, we have to commit ourselves to finding the greatest efficiency in public policies, cooperating with the government in implementing these policies ... particularly the development of popular power with is an extraordinary task."

Gomez argued that “the party should be the promoter, the driving force of the policies of the government, so that it is not the government dictating to the party, but rather the government constructing its policies together with the party and with the social movements.”