

**Contents**

- 369. The Trial of Thomas Hardy: A Forgotten Chapter in the Working Class Fight for Democratic Rights  
Ian Angus
- 370. Obama and Clinton Use “Smart Power” Against Honduras  
Eva Golinger
- 371. What the Québec Debate on the Hijab Conceals  
Benoit Renaud
- 372. Québécois Denounce Supreme Court Attack on Language Rights  
Richard Fidler, Amir Khadir
- 373. Vale Inco Strike Shows Need for International Action  
Marc Bonhomme
- 374. Popular Resistance Rejects Fake Elections in Honduras  
Felipe Stuart Cournoyer, NFRAC
- 375. Escalation of Afghanistan War: Canada Faces a Fateful Decision  
Roger Annis
- 376. Eyes on the Maobadi: Four Reasons Nepal’s Revolution Matters  
Mike Ely
- 377. Chavez Proposes International of Left Parties  
Kiraz Janicke
- 378. Chavez’s Historic Call for International Socialist Unity  
Federico Fuentes
- 379. Canadian government rocked by accusations of abuse, torture of Afghan prisoners  
Roger Annis
- 380. Québec solidaire supports pro-Palestine BDS campaign  
Richard Fidler

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Socialist Voice #369, November 4, 2009

## **The Trial of Thomas Hardy: A Forgotten Chapter in the Working Class Fight for Democratic Rights**

**by Ian Angus**

November 5, 2009, is the 215th anniversary of the acquittal of Thomas Hardy on charges of High Treason. Hardy is nearly forgotten today, but for decades workers and democrats in England celebrated November 5 every year as the anniversary of a major victory, a triumph over a powerful state that had deployed immense resources to crush working class organizations and suppress popular demands for democratic rights.

Thomas Hardy was born in Scotland on March 3, 1752, the son of a sailor who died at sea when Thomas was eight. He moved to London in 1774, where he worked as a shoemaker, a trade he had learned from his grandfather.

Only a tiny minority of working people in the 1790s worked in anything we would recognize as a factory. A Marxist historian writes, “the characteristic industrial worker worked not in a mill or factory but (as an artisan or ‘mechanic’) in a small workshop or in his own home ....” (Thompson 259)

Thomas Hardy was one of those artisans. After working for others for 17 years, he opened his own small shop in Piccadilly in 1791. As he later wrote, the experience of trying to set up a shop in economic hard times forced him to think. The country was rich and the people worked hard – so why was it so difficult to make ends meet?

“It required no extraordinary penetration, once the enquiry was begun, to be able to trace it to the corrupt practices of men falsely calling themselves the representatives of the people, but who were, in fact, selected by a comparatively few influential individuals, who preferred their own particular aggrandizement to the general interest of the community.

“The next enquiry naturally arose – Was the cause of the people hopeless? Must they and their posterity for ever groan under this intolerable load? Could not the nation, by a proper use of its moral powers, set itself free?” (Hardy, 10)

England in the eighteenth century was not by any stretch of the imagination a democracy. Large landowners were firmly in charge, and the entire system was grossly corrupt. It was government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich.

“There were a few constituencies where perhaps 10 per cent of the male electorate could vote, but these were easily outnumbered by the ‘rotten boroughs’, where the Member was effectively nominated by his patron, a lord or a landowner or both. The quarter of the population which lived in urban areas was entirely unrepresented – the franchise was still based on voting in counties and in rural areas. No more than 4 per cent of the male population was entitled to vote, and most of those either didn’t vote, or voted according to how much they were bribed or patronized.” (Foot, 46)

### **‘Another class of people’**

There had been many middle-class and even aristocratic political reform societies in England before, but Hardy proposed something different: “*a Society of another class of the people*, to effect that most desirable and necessary Reform, which had baffled the united associations of men of the greatest talents, worth, and consequence in the nation.” (Hardy 103. emphasis added)

The result, formed on January 25, 1792 by “eight plain, homely, and obscure citizens,” was the London Corresponding Society. Hardy was elected Secretary and Treasurer at the first meeting.

The LCS was determined to be an organization for and of working people. Dues were just one penny a week. Branches – limited to 30 members each, to encourage full participation and discussion – met weekly in working class pubs in various parts of London and the surrounding towns. When a sympathetic member of parliament joined, he was welcomed, but not allowed to chair a meeting, lest the LCS be seen as allied with the Whigs. Hardy wrote:

“We were so scrupulous about the admission of any of those of the higher ranks that when any of them offered to pay more than we usually demanded on the admission of a new member we would not receive it.” (quoted in Thale, 8)

The Society grew to 25 members in two weeks, and to 2,000 in six months. Its office, in Hardy’s shoe shop, became the hub for communication and coordination among similar organizations of artisans, “mechanics,” and small tradesmen in throughout England, Scotland and Wales, all devoted to campaigning for universal suffrage and annual elections. They saw those objectives not as ends in themselves, but as a step towards ending poverty and hunger.

For the rest of the decade, until it was formally outlawed by an Act of Parliament, the London Corresponding Society was the largest, best known, and (to the ruling class) most notorious working class organization in England. At its peak in 1795, it organized public meetings in London attended by 100,000 people and was in communication with similar groups in over 100 cities and towns.

Although the LCS focused on Parliamentary reform, it also campaigned against the war that Britain was waging, in alliance with Europe’s worst despots, to overthrow France’s revolutionary government. Members of the LCS and other reform groups across the country were also actively involved in the nascent trade union movement and in widespread protests against high food prices during the famine of 1794-95.

### **Repression**

The British ruling class was outraged at the very idea that the “swinish multitude,” as conservative ideologue Edmond Burke called them, might play any role in politics. In the House of Lords, a Bishop sputtered that “he did not know what the mass of the people in any country had to do with the laws but to obey them.” (Soloway, 63)

Such gross class prejudice wasn’t limited to reactionaries. Christopher Wyvill, a Yorkshire landowner and prominent advocate of limited Parliamentary reform, warned in 1792 that “the right of Suffrage communicated to an ignorant and ferocious Populace would lead to tumult and confusion.” Referring to the popularity of Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man* among the radicals, he wrote:

“If Mr. Paine should be able to rouse up the lower classes, their interference will probably be marked by wild work, and all we now possess, whether in private property, or public liberty, will be at the mercy of a lawless and furious rabble.” (quoted in Thompson 26)

Early in 1792 the government embarked on a campaign that combined anti-democratic propaganda with outright repression, to force worker democrats off the political stage. It financed mass distribution of anti-radical newspapers and pamphlets, accused the radicals of being paid agents of France, and (through Anglican Bishops, who owed their lucrative posts to the Cabinet) instructed the clergy to preach that supporters of the democratic movement would surely go to hell. At the same time, it encouraged “Church and King” mobs to attack or

intimidate radical meetings, denied licenses to pub-owners who rented meeting rooms to radicals, and sent spies and provocateurs into radical societies.

In June 1792, Tom Paine was charged with seditious libel for the views expressed in *Rights of Man*. He escaped to France, but was tried and convicted in his absence, and *Rights of Man* was banned.

In Edinburgh in 1793, three men, including LCS chairman Maurice Margarot, were charged with sedition – consisting of arguing for parliamentary reform and opposing the war with France. After trial before an openly hostile judge, they were sentenced to 14 years “transportation” – exile and compulsory labour in Australia.

### **A Show Trial at Old Bailey**

On May 12, 1794, Hardy and eleven other leading figures in the reform movement were arrested. The police ransacked Hardy’s home while his pregnant wife lay in bed. They took him first to jail and then to the Parliament buildings, where he was interrogated for several days by a committee that included the Prime Minister and several senior cabinet ministers. Two weeks later, Parliament passed a bill suspending Habeas Corpus, thus allowing the government to imprison the twelve in the Tower of London without charge for several months.

While he was in prison, a reactionary mob (Hardy believed they were paid and organized by the government) attacked Hardy’s home, breaking the windows and threatening to set the building on fire. His wife escaped through a small back window, but the physical and emotional strain had fatal effects: on August 27 her baby was stillborn, and she died a few hours later.

On October 6, a handpicked Grand Jury charged the twelve men with “High Treasons and Misprisions of Treasons, against the person and authority of the King.” If convicted, each would be hanged, drawn and quartered – “hanged by the neck, cut down while still alive, disembowelled (and his entrails burned before his face) and then beheaded and quartered.” (Thompson, p. 21)

Hardy was the first in the dock, because, he later wrote, he “was supposed to be the most helpless of this band.” (Hardy, 110) The government threw unprecedented resources into prosecuting him.

“The trial of Thomas Hardy was the longest and most expensive trial for high treason that had ever been heard in Britain. The prosecution case was conducted by no less than eight barristers, led by the Attorney-General Sir John Scott and the Solicitor-General Sir John Mitford .... Four judges sat with [Chief Justice] Eyre on the bench ...

“The trial began on Tuesday 28 October 1794, and continued, with a break on Sunday, until Wednesday 5 November; no previous trial had lasted more than twenty-four hours, from the reading of the indictment to the delivery of the verdict....

“Scott’s opening speech, 100,000 words long, took nine hours to deliver.” (Barrell, 318, 324)

But despite all the money and time they devoted, the prosecution's case was weak. They had masses of documents and the testimony of spies and turncoats, but none of it demonstrated treason. In essence, their argument was that campaigning for political reform was equivalent to plotting to overthrow and murder the King. The prosecutors seem to have hoped that the conservative biases of a jury of property-owners would prejudice them against a working class radical who was challenging the right of property to rule.

The strategy failed. Shortly before the trial, noted political philosopher William Godwin published an essay that effectively demolished the legal basis for equating political reform with treason. It was so widely-read and influential that one of the lawyers for the prosecution denied in court that the case depended on any such argument. Hardy's lawyer, Thomas Erskine, was devastating in his cross-examination of government witnesses and in his address to the jury.

After nine long days of trial, on November 5 the jury took only three hours to decide unanimously that Hardy was not guilty.

Hardy tried to leave the building quietly, but a huge crowd of supporters surrounded his carriage, released the horses, and pulled him through the streets cheering. At his request they took him to the cemetery, where they waited quietly while he visited his wife's grave for the first time.

Apparently believing that the Hardy verdict was a fluke, the government proceeded with treason charges against Hardy's colleagues. The trial of John Horne Tooke, a long-time moderate reformer, lasted five days; that of John Thelwall, the best-known and most popular LCS speaker, lasted three. Both were acquitted. Humiliated, the government withdrew all charges against the remaining nine radical leaders.

The show trial was part of a deliberate plan to crush the reform movement and to deny working people any role in politics. Hardy was told by a source he trusted that the government had 800 other warrants prepared – 300 of them already signed – that it planned to execute as soon as it won guilty verdicts. That plan was defeated, a major setback for reaction in England.

Thomas Hardy's acquittal was a victory for the radical movement, but it was devastating for him personally. His wife had died while he was in prison; his shop and home had been destroyed; the defence had cost him every cent he had. Reading between the lines in the *Memoir* he published years later, it seems that the experience left him emotionally drained, if not shattered. For over 30 years Hardy was a regular participant in the annual dinners celebrating the acquittals of 1794, but he never again played an active role in politics.

### **The first worker revolutionaries**

Hardy and his comrades were not socialists. Socialist ideas didn't yet exist, nor did the social forces that would make socialism possible. The radicals of the 1790s drew inspiration from the French Revolution, from the century-old traditions of the Levellers, and above all from Tom Paine, whose book *Rights of Man* sold an unprecedented 200,000 copies in 1792-93. Socially the radicals favoured something akin to the 20th century welfare state. Politically they were radical democrats. Many of their demands weren't won until well into the twentieth century, and some still aren't on the books.

In their time, they were revolutionaries. As a recent historian writes:

“In the context of England’s socio-economic and political structures in the 1790s, democratic ideology pivoting on manhood suffrage had revolutionary implications. How could a society which so ostentatiously hinged on the very unequal distribution of wealth, bolstered by a political system excluding all but the very rich, survive the implementation or imposition of democracy?” (Wells, 133)

After the acquittals of 1794, it took the Pitt government several years to suppress Britain’s first authentic working class movement. It was able to do so only by passing draconian laws that greatly expanded the grounds for charges of treason, outlawed any meeting of more than 50 people, suspended *Habeas Corpus*, and finally banned all trade unions and the London Corresponding Society itself in 1799.

Even then, the radicals were only driven underground. As E.P. Thompson showed in his monumental study *The Making of the English Working Class*, the tradition of working class resistance to oppression remained strong. When mass protests broke out in 1815-1819, they built on the traditions and ideas of the 1790s and were led by many of the same people.

“Throughout the war years there were Thomas Hardys in every town and in many villages throughout England, with a kist or shelf full of Radical books, biding their time, putting in a word at the tavern, the chapel, the smithy, the shoemaker’s shop, waiting for the movement to revive. And the movement for which they waited did not belong to gentlemen, manufacturers, or rate-payers; it was their own.” (Thompson, 201)

Those radicals kept the spirit of 1794 alive in the hardest times of ruling class repression and working class retrenchment. In tribute to them, the victory of November 5, 1794 should be remembered today, and Thomas Hardy surely deserves to be restored to his rightful place in the pantheon of working class heroes.

*Ian Angus is co-editor of Socialist Voice and editor of Climate and Capitalism.*

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## **Obama and Clinton Use “Smart Power” Against Honduras**

by Eva Golinger

*(This article was written before the collapse of the latest deal to restore President Zelaya)*

Henry Kissinger said that diplomacy is the “art of restraining power”. Obviously, the most influential ideologue on US foreign policy of the twenty first century was referring to the necessity to “restrain the power” of other countries and governments in order to maintain the dominant world power of the United States.

Presidents in the style of George W. Bush employed “Hard Power” to achieve this goal: weapons, bombs, threats and military invasions. Others, like Bill Clinton, used “Soft Power”: cultural warfare, Hollywood, ideals, diplomacy, moral authority and campaigns to “win the hearts and minds” of those in enemy nations. The Obama administration has opted for a mutation of these two concepts, fusing military power with diplomacy, political and economic influence with cultural penetration and legal maneuvering. They call this “Smart Power.” Its first application is the coup d’etat in Honduras, and as of today, it’s worked to perfection.

During her confirmation hearing before the Senate, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton remarked that “we should use what has been called “smart power”, the complete range of tools that are at our disposal – diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal and cultural – choosing the correct tool, or combination of tools, for each situation. With “smart power,” diplomacy will be the vanguard of our foreign policy.” Clinton later reinforced this concept affirming that the “wisest path will be to first use persuasion.”

So, what is intelligent about this concept? It’s a form of politics that is difficult to classify, difficult to detect and difficult to deconstruct. Honduras is a clear example. On one hand, President Obama condemned the coup against President Zelaya while his ambassador in Tegucigalpa held regular meetings with the coup leaders. Secretary of State Clinton repeated over and over again during the past four months that Washington didn’t want to “influence” the situation in Honduras – that Hondurans needed to resolve their crisis, without outside interference. But it was Washington that imposed the mediation process “led” by President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, and Washington that kept funding the coup regime and its supporters via USAID, and Washington that controlled and commanded the Honduran armed forces, involved in repressing the people and imposing a brutal regime, through its massive military presence in the Soto Cano military base.

Washington lobbyists also wrote the San José “agreement,” and in the end, it was the high level State Department and White House delegation that “persuaded” the Hondurans to accept the agreement. Despite the constant US interference in the coup d’etat in Honduras – funding, design, and political and military support – Washington’s “smart power” approach was able to distort public opinion and make the Obama administration come out as the grand victor of “multilateralism”.

What “smart power” achieved was a way to disguise Washington’s unilateralism as multilateralism. From day one, Washington imposed its agenda. On July 1st, spokespeople for the Department of State admitted in a press briefing that they had prior knowledge of the coup in Honduras. They also admitted that two high level State Department officials, Thomas Shannon and James Steinberg, were in Honduras the week before the coup meeting with the civil and military groups involved. They said their purpose was to “impede the coup,” but how, therefore, can they explain that the airplane that forcefully exiled President Zelaya left from the Soto Cano military base in the presence of US military officers?

The facts demonstrate the truth about Washington and the coup in Honduras, and the subsequent successful experiment with “smart power.” Washington knew about the coup before it happened, yet continued to fund those involved via USAID and NED. The Pentagon aided in the illegal forced exile of President Zelaya, and later, the Obama administration used the Organization of American States (OAS) – during a moment at which it was on the border of extinction – as a façade to impose its agenda. The discourse of the Department of State always legitimated the coup leaders, calling on “both parts...to resolve the political dispute in a peaceful way through dialogue.” Since when is an illegal usurper of power considered a “legitimate part” capable of dialogue? Obviously, a criminal actor who takes power by force is not interested in dialoguing. Based on this Washington logic, the world should call on the Obama administration to “resolve its political dispute with Al Qaeda in a peaceful way through dialogue, and not war.”

The Obama/Clinton “smart power” achieved its first victory during the initial days of the coup, persuading the member states of the OAS to accept a 72-hour wait period to allow the coup regime in Honduras to “think through its actions”. Soon after, Secretary of State Clinton imposed the mediation efforts, led by Arias, and by then, so much space had been ceded to Washington, that the US just stepped in and took the reigns. When President Zelaya went to Washington and met with Clinton, it was obvious who was in control. And that’s how they played it out, buying more and more time up until the last minute, so that even if Zelaya returns to power now he will have no space or time to govern.

The people were left out, excluded. Months of repression, violence, persecution, human rights violations, curfews, media closures, tortures and political assassinations have been forgotten. What a relief, as Subsecretary of State Thomas Shannon remarked upon achieving the signature of Micheletti and Zelaya on the final “agreement,” that the situation in Honduras was resolved “without violence.”

Upon signature of the “agreement” this past October 30th, Washington immediately lifted the few restrictions it had imposed on the coup regime as a pressure tactic. Now they can get visas again and travel north, they don’t have to worry about the millions of dollars from USAID, which hadn’t even been suspended in the first place. The US military in presence in Soto Cano can reinstate all their activities – oh wait, they never stopped in the first place. The Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) of the Pentagon affirmed just days after the coup that “everything is normal with our armed forces in Honduras, they are engaging in their usual activities with their Honduran counterparts.” And Washington is already preparing its delegation of elections observers for the November 29th presidential elections – they are already on their way.

Forget about Cold War torturer Billy Joya who was scheming with the coup regime against the resistance; or the Colombian paramilitary forces sent in to help the coup regime “control” the population. Don’t worry anymore about the sonic warfare LRAD weapon used to torture those inside the Brazilian embassy in an attempt to oust Zelaya from the building. Nothing happened. As Thomas Shannon said, “we congratulate two great men for reaching this historic agreement”. And Secretary of State Clinton commented that “this agreement is a tremendous achievement for the Hondurans.” Wait, for who?

In the end, the celebrated “agreement” imposed by Washington only calls upon the Honduran Congress – the same Congress that falsified Zelaya’s resignation letter in order to justify the coup, and the same Congress that supported the illegal installation of Micheletti in the presidency – to determine whether or not it wants to reinstate Zelaya as president. And only after receiving a legal opinion from the Honduran Supreme Court – the same one that said Zelaya was a traitor for calling for a non-binding poll vote on potential future constitutional reform, and the same one that ordered his violent capture. Even if the Congress’ answer is positive, Zelaya would not have any power. The “agreement” stipulates that the members of his cabinet will be imposed by those political parties involved in the coup, the armed forces will be under the control of the Supreme Court that supported the coup, and Zelaya could be tried for his alleged “crime” of “treason” because he wanted to have a non-binding poll on constitutional reform.

Per the “agreement” a truth commission would supervise its implementation. Today, Ricardo Lagos, ex president of Chile and staunch Washington ally, was announced as the leader of the Honduran Truth Commission. Lagos is co-director of the Board of Directors of the Inter-American Dialogue, a right wing think tank that influences Washington’s policies on Latin America. Lagos also was charged with creating a Chilean version of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), la Fundación Democracia y Desarrollo, to “promote democracy” in Latin America, US-style. Upon leaving the presidency in 2006, Lagos was named President of the Club of Madrid – an exclusive club of ex presidents dedicated to “promoting democracy” around the world. Several key figures involved in currently destabilizing left-leaning Latin American governments are members of this “club”, including Jorge Quiroga and Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (ex presidents of Bolivia), Felipe González (ex prime minister of Spain), Václav Havel (ex president of the Czech Republic) and José María Aznar (ex prime minister of Spain), amongst many others.

In the end, “smart power” was sufficiently intelligent to deceive those who today celebrate an “end to the crisis” in Honduras. But for a majority of people in Latin America, the victory of Obama’s “smart power” in Honduras is a dark and dangerous shadow closing in on us. Initiatives such as ALBA have just begun to achieve a level of Latin American independence from the dominant northern power. For the first time in history, the nations and peoples of Latin America have been collectively standing strong with dignity and sovereignty, building their futures. And then along came Obama with his “smart power”, and ALBA was hit by the coup in Honduras, Latin American integration has been weakened by the US military expansion in Colombia, and the struggle for independence and sovereignty in Washington’s backyard is being squashed by a sinister smile and insincere handshake.

Bowing before Washington, the crisis in Honduras “was resolved.” Ironically, the same crisis was fomented by the US in the first place. There is talk of similar coups in Paraguay, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Venezuela, where subversion, counterinsurgency and destabilization increase daily. The people of Honduras remain in resistance, despite the “agreement” reached by those in power. Their determined insurrection and commitment to justice is a symbol of dignity. The only way to defeat imperialist aggression – soft, hard or smart – is through the union and integration of the people.

“The illegal we do immediately. The unconstitutional takes longer.” – Henry Kissinger

*(From Eva Golinger’s blog, Postcards from the Revolution)*

Socialist Voice #371, November 9, 2009

## **What the Québec Debate on the Hijab Conceals**

### **A LeftViews article**

*A member of the International Socialism collective in Québec solidaire replies to articles in journals such as L'aut'journal, published by "left" Parti Québécois supporters, which has been campaigning against the hijab.*

*LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion. This article was published in the November 3 issue of Presse-toi-à-gauche, an online publication in the periphery of Québec solidaire. It was translated by Richard Fidler for Life on the Left.*

### **By Benoit Renaud**

The debate on accommodation, religious symbols and secularism has been recurring periodically since the period of collective psychodrama in 2007 that led to the election of 41 ADQ members to the National Assembly and the appointment of the Bouchard-Tremblay Commission.[1] This debate is a challenge for the left, given the complexity of the issues it raises.

For example, we are presented with a choice worthy of a Solomon: to discriminate against the members of minority communities or endorse patriarchal customs. In effect, to decide between sexism and racism. The only way to avoid falling into both these traps is to grasp the overall dynamics of oppression in all its forms, in the context of globalized capitalism and therefore imperialism. The debate must be situated in its context if we are to understand clearly the real meaning of the proposals being advanced for action.

First, it is necessary to correct a common – yet evident – error in vocabulary. In French, clothing that covers the hair and/or the neck is called a *foulard* (headscarf). A *voile* (veil) is clothing that conceals the face. There is a qualitative difference. Some writers, insistently confusing these quite different accessories, display a lack of rigour, to say the least. In what follows, I will refer to the Islamic headscarf or hijab. Genuine veils are a quite different question, since they impede communication and actually “hide” the women who wear them.

### **Imperialism: the number one danger**

It is no accident that this debate arose in Quebec during the 22nd Regiment's initial six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. The countries of the West have been immersed in a wave of Islamophobia since the Muslim Middle East became the principal target of the imperialist and neocolonial offensives, and especially since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Western governments justify such politics as the boycott of the Palestinian government in Gaza duly elected in 2006, the occupation that is dragging on in Iraq, the military escalation and endemic corruption in Afghanistan, and the constant threats against Iran, by fueling the ideology of

Orientalism, which presents the peoples of this region of the world as barbarians, backward, allergic to democracy or modernity.

However, it was the previous interventions by imperialism, in alliance with the local reactionary forces, that crushed the left and paved the way for ultra-conservatism with a religious overlay. Without British support, there would have been no Saudi monarchy; without U.S. interference, no dictatorship of the Shah; without Russian-U.S. rivalry in Central Asia, no civil war in Afghanistan and no Taliban, etc. So it is imperialism itself that is the main danger to the security of the world's peoples, and not some supposed grand fundamentalist conspiracy.

### **The sexism of others...**

One is surprised to see some right-wing and centre-right politicians discover their affinities with feminism – provided it is to fight the sexism of “the others,” those foreigners who despise “their women.” The wearing of headscarves is portrayed as a threat to the fundamental values of the “nation.” But nothing is done to fight the hyper-sexualization of teen-agers, sexist advertising, cuts in the budgets of groups assisting women victims of violence, etc. In Quebec, over the last 20 years, some 500 women and children have been killed by a husband or former spouse or a violent father. Is Christianity held responsible? Do we prohibit every sexist thing in the culture of the majority?

We must be clear. This right-thinking discourse aimed at the sexism of others is in perfect harmony with the most common anti-feminist idea: that the liberation of women, here in the West, is a *fait accompli*. The Quebec Federation of Women (FFQ), the coalition of virtually all women's groups and all tendencies within feminism, incurred the wrath of all the right-thinking people when it dared to say no both to the obligation to wear the Islamic hijab and to its prohibition. For the FFQ, the issue was one of respecting the women who wear the scarf and accompanying them in their efforts at integration and emancipation, instead of excluding them and stigmatizing them. No one denies that Islam is a sexist and patriarchal religion. But it is not by stigmatizing and marginalizing Muslim women who wear the hijab that we are going to help them achieve their liberation.

### **Islamophobia, a form of “acceptable” xenophobia**

The other contextual element that eludes most of the thinking on the matter is that of immigration in a period of crisis of the neoliberal economy. In Europe, the far-right parties have draped their anti-immigrant discourse in an especially virulent version of Islamophobia. The National Front in France need no longer campaign against “the Arabs”, it can attack the Muslims, with the moral cover of the traditional parties, under the umbrella of secularism and the values of the Republic.

Closer to home, the Parti indépendantiste has found a way to affirm, in the very same section of its program, its support for secularism and for the preservation of our Christian heritage! The caricature of peoples originally from Africa or Asia, sometimes encouraged by intellectuals who have emigrated from these continents and are now crusading against fundamentalists, creates a climate that is used to justify all the petty discriminations in hiring, access to housing, etc. If the government sets the example by prohibiting the wearing of the hijab among the half a million

employees in the public and parapublic sectors, how, with any credibility, can it conduct an effort directed against the ordinary racism that victimizes the members of these communities?

Women who wear the Islamic hijab should have the same right to work as anyone else. As a member of a trade union in the Quebec public sector and a co-worker of an immigrant woman who wears a hijab, I expect my union to defend her right to work and to dress as she wishes. The state should not decide the dress code for 450,000 workers based on ideological and arbitrary criteria. If we accept the prohibition of the hijab, out of concern for secularism, what other restrictions are we going to face later on? Prohibition of Che Guevara t-shirts? Prohibit a teacher from running as a candidate in elections?

To give in to the fear campaign against Muslims by prohibiting the wearing of any religious insignia in the public sector would undermine our efforts to mobilize against the war and imperialism, against xenophobia and discrimination against immigrants of various origins, and our ability to recognize the very real sexism that still exists in “our own” society, as well as our fight for the unity of the labour movement in opposition to an employer who is preparing to make us pay the cost of the crisis.

[1] (*Translator's note*) Popular support for a small right-wing party, the Action Démocratique du Québec, suddenly ballooned when it campaigned against attempts to accommodate the religious beliefs of members of religious minorities. Although it elected 41 members in the 2007 general election, the ADQ vote dropped precipitously in the 2008 election; it now has only four MLAs. In the interim, a government-appointed commission headed by academics Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor held extensive hearings throughout Quebec and issued a report supporting “reasonable” accommodation in the interests of “interculturalism” with a view to integrating immigrant and other minorities into Quebec society.

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## **Québécois Denounce Supreme Court Attack on Language Rights**

**by Richard Fidler**

The October 22 ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada overturning yet another section of Quebec's *Charter of the French Language* (CFL) has been met with angry protests by a broad range of opinion in the province.

The Court declared unconstitutional a law adopted unanimously by Quebec's National Assembly in 2002 that closed a loophole in the Charter being used to circumvent the requirement that Quebec students attend French-language schools. In effect, the judgment restores free choice of language of elementary schooling for parents rich enough to send their kids for a few years to private schools not funded by the Quebec government before enrolling them in English public schools.

More than 30 years ago, Quebec passed laws making attendance at French schools mandatory for all Francophone and immigrant children enrolled in government-funded schools. The legislation was adopted in response to mounting concern over the fatal attraction of English in a province economically dominated by Anglophone capital and constitutionally lacking sovereignty in key areas of jurisdiction crucial to its definition as a Francophone nation within the Canadian state. Public education in French has long been seen as crucial to integrating immigrants into the province's majority Francophone society.

The Court's decision was a rude reminder to Québécois that the key legislation, the popular Charter of the French Language, adopted in 1977 as Bill 101, continues to be subject to attack by the federally-appointed judiciary using provisions of Trudeau's 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that were specifically aimed against the Quebec language Charter. In past decisions, the Supreme Court has overturned other provisions of the CFL that made French the sole language of Quebec courts and legislation, public advertising and corporate names, and that restricted English-language public schooling to children with a parent who had attended an English elementary school in Quebec.

In the latter case, Quebec's National Assembly had responded to the Court's ruling by making English-language education in a public or private government-subsidized school available to any child educated in English in Canada or having a parent educated in English in Canada – thus bringing the CFL into compliance with the Canadian Charter. But it insisted that English had to be the “major part” of that education in the minority language. This qualifying clause was designed to limit attempts by some parents to make their children eligible for English schooling by sending them for a brief period to private English schools, then asking that they be admitted to English-language public or subsidized schools.

### **Important progress under Law 101**

The French-language Charter's requirement that non-Francophone immigrants to Quebec, with few exceptions, send their children to French-language schools was widely accepted and within a few years a whole new generation of minority Anglophone and immigrant community youths were emerging from the public school system with fluency in French, the majority language. These are commonly referred to as the "children of Bill 101." It seemed that for the first time in many years Quebec was reversing the trend toward anglicization and the decline of its defining French-language culture.

But English continues to exert a powerful force of attraction in Quebec, especially in recent years with the growth of globalization and the Internet. This pressure was felt most acutely in the educational system. Before long, private English "bridging" schools not subsidized by the government were springing up to dispense minority-language education to students for a brief period that would qualify them for admission to English public or subsidized private schools.

Between 1982 and 1989, only a few hundred pupils were admitted to English schools after a brief period in a private unsubsidized school. However, between 1998 and 2002 this number climbed to almost 5,000, or 5% of the total enrolment in the Quebec English school system. Thus in 2002 the National Assembly adopted Law 104, which amended the CFL to provide in part that, in determining eligibility for English schooling, no account would be taken of English-language education received at an unsubsidized school. Predictably, this legislation was challenged by Anglophone rights groups.

In a 2005 judgment (*Solski*), the Supreme Court held that while Quebec was entitled to restrict access to English schools, the determination as to whether prior attendance at an unsubsidized private English school constituted the "major part" of a child's education had to be determined not just numerically (as in the number of years of attendance) but qualitatively – that is, that each individual case was to be considered on its merits and that it sufficed if such education was "a significant part, though not necessarily the majority, of the child's instruction."

In last week's judgment (*Nguyen*), the Court went further. It held that the Law 104 prohibition against taking a child's "pathway" in an unsubsidized private school into account is "excessive." It therefore invalidated the provision of the French-language Charter enacted unanimously in 2002 by the Quebec National Assembly.

### **Court's analysis 'superficial' and insensitive**

The Supreme Court ruling was widely denounced, including by all the major union centrals in Quebec. The Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ) charged the Court with using "political and economic considerations" to dilute the "message that our language is the language of the common public culture and the language of integration in Quebec." The Quebec Labour Federation (FTQ) protested: "We cannot leave it to the good judgment of administrators, however impartial, to analyze case by case and in which circumstances entire families could exempt themselves by a subterfuge from the provisions of the law." By allowing non-Anglophones and future workers to choose English in a society that is majority Francophone, the

FTQ said, the decision served to undermine the labour movement's strenuous efforts for many years to establish French as the language of work.

"Rarely have we seen a unanimous judgment of the Supreme Court arouse such reprobation in Quebec," wrote Michel David, a political columnist in the Montréal daily *Le Devoir*. Drawing attention to editorial support for the judgment in the rest of Canada, he concluded that "In English Canada they simply refuse to recognize that French is threatened in Quebec. To claim the contrary necessarily denotes bad faith and an attempt to promote Quebec sovereignty." In the federal Parliament, the Bloc Québécois was the only party to denounce the judgment, although the NDP – in an effort to distance itself from the Court's judgment – presented a motion affirming that Quebec has "the right to ensure that immigrants arriving in Quebec learn French first and foremost."

André Braën, a law professor at the University of Ottawa, expressed a typical reaction of Quebec legal scholars. "This decision," he wrote in *Le Devoir*, "demonstrates the lack of sensitivity that the Supreme Court of Canada accords to the Quebec reality. It is based on a superficial analysis of the linguistic problematic that takes no account of the asymmetry prevailing in this area between Quebec and the rest of Canada. In Quebec there is a private educational system that has no equivalent in the other provinces.

"In Quebec, it is the Francophones and the Allophones [those with neither French nor English as their mother tongue], and not the Anglophone minority, who are fighting for access to the English school. Even today, a large proportion, if not a majority of the immigration settled in Quebec, chooses English as its language of use....

"In short, the Court has reintroduced in practice a limited form of free choice. It even indicates how to achieve it: spend a little more time in an unsubsidized private English school that does not advertise itself as a "bridging" school. And the dirty work will be left to the government if it wants to limit the number of authorizations given by way of exception, whether for family or humanitarian reasons, special learning or other needs....

"We know that in Quebec free choice of the language of education already exists at the college and university levels. With this decision, we must add the elementary and secondary school levels. While the English school should be reserved to the members of Quebec's Anglophone minority, the Anglophone system is becoming increasingly an immense immersion system for Francophone and Allophone pupils. The Solski and Nguyen judgments open the door to the English public school for the better-off."

Prof. Braën suggested that an appropriate response to the latest judgment might be to make the Charter of the French Language applicable to private unsubsidized schools. But whatever the government's decision, he said, "it will also be challenged in the courts."

The Supreme Court decision will reinforce the view of many Québécois that the definitive defence of their language, culture and national identity lies in breaking from the federal regime and establishing an independent state. That is the spirit, if not the explicit message, of the strong statement in opposition to the Supreme Court ruling issued by Amir Khadir, a member of the National Assembly and co-chair of Québec solidaire, the new left-wing party in Quebec. It can

be read, in French on the Québec solidaire website, and in my English translation, below. The fight for Quebec independence will be the main issue of debate at the next congress of Québec solidaire, to be held November 20-22 in the Montréal suburb of Laval.

\* \* \*

**Statement by Québec solidaire leader Amir Khadir,  
denouncing Court ruling on French language**

(October 28, 2009) At a time when French is reported to be the language now of fewer than 80 percent of the people of Quebec, at a time when we are struggling to ensure that French remains the major language in Montréal, especially in the work environment, finance, or the technical and scientific industries, the Supreme Court of Canada – in a deplorably blind disregard for context – has declared unconstitutional the sections of Law 101, the Charter of the French Language, that prohibit parents from resorting to unsubsidized English-language private schools to enable their children to access the subsidized English public school system.

On October 22, the co-chair of my party, Françoise David, expressed our indignation at this decision. Québec solidaire is outraged by this decision, which legalizes a dubious practice and creates an additional breach in legislation whose sole purpose is to protect the French language in Quebec.

We are outraged to see that the Court has ruled in favour of those who, like Brent Tyler [the lawyer for the applicants], have systematically fought Law 101. The members of our nation, whether their mother tongue is French, English or otherwise, are trying to create better conditions for living together, in harmony and political equilibrium. But a privileged minority, represented by Mr. Tyler, is manipulating some Allophones and our laws in opposition to Law 101, a necessary bastion against the cultural imperialism exercised not by the English language itself but by a domineering vision of Anglo-Saxon culture that seeks to impose itself both in Quebec and throughout the world.

That reductionist and domineering vision is certainly not held by the contemporary creators of literature and culture that is expressed in English. Creators, in whatever language, participate in the construction of a civilization that encompasses and is inspired by all cultures, their specificity and their originality.

Fortunately, that vision is not shared either by the majority of the Anglophone community of Quebec, or among the Allophones. The Anglophones and Allophones of Quebec do not seek to weaken French in Quebec. They do not try to violate the spirit of Law 101. I am myself an Allophone immigrant and I invite all of those like me, all of us Québécois men and women, to join with the members of the National Assembly in defending the continued existence of the French language in Quebec and in defending Law 101.

The struggle of the Québécois to protect the French language in Quebec is the struggle of all those who believe that another, non-domineering vision of the world, is possible – that we are not condemned by fate to assimilate into the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture propagated by the imperial economic power the United States and their allies wield in order to transform all

cultures into a single market open to the hegemony of culture conceived as a commodity, subject only to the rules of the market.

The fight for the protection and promotion of the French language in Quebec is the common struggle of humanity to preserve the cultural diversity that attends the sovereign power of nations to protect and promote their specificity, their originality, their space of freedom respectful of other nations, in a relationship of cooperation among equals and not submission to a single culture that seeks to overcome our cultures through the imposed uniformity of a single language, which for historical reasons happens to be the English language.

The Supreme Court has again proved to us that it always leans in the same direction. Its decision legitimizing the trampling of the spirit of Law 101 by overruling Law 104, as the Court has just done, proves that the institutions of the federal power have been moulded by a vision of history that denies, with regrettable consistency, the inalienable rights of the Quebec people, including their right to political, linguistic, cultural and legislative self-determination.

The French-language public school is an essential instrument in spreading the influence of our culture. It is our duty to protect it. Since the amendments to Law 101 invalidated by the Supreme Court were adopted unanimously by the National Assembly in 2002, Québec solidaire urges the government of Quebec to find immediately the legislative or juridical means to seal this open breach. The primacy of French in Quebec is not negotiable, whether the Supreme Court likes it or not.

*A slightly different version of this article was published in Richard Fidler's blog, Life on the Left.*

Socialist Voice #373, November 11, 2009

## **Vale Inco Strike Shows Need for International Action**

**A LeftViews article, by Marc Bonhomme**

*A Québécois militant, member of Québec solidaire, discusses the global implications of the strike by 3,500 workers at Vale Inco, the world's largest nickel mine, in Sudbury, Ontario.*

*LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion.*

In France's south Pacific colony of New Caledonia, a small delegation of Vale Inco strikers from Sudbury, in Northeastern Ontario, most of them Franco-Ontarians, met in October with the union at the island's Vale Inco nickel mine, due to open in 2010 although it threatens a UNESCO nature reserve. The newspaper *Nouvelles calédoniennes* reported the encounter, in its October 31 edition:

In the face of the global economy, the labour movement is looking to internationalize. In Canada, 3,500 workers at Vale Inco are currently on strike. Their union, the United Steelworkers, has launched a crusade to visit every Vale Inco site on the planet, for the purpose of forging alliances. In New Caledonia, union representatives met with the unions that represent the workers at the plant located in the south. ...

For the past three and a half months, ...workers at Vale Inco in Canada have been engaged in a test of strength with the Brazilian multinational that absorbed Inco, the Canadian nickel giant which initiated the Goro Nickel project in Caledonia. ...

They are accusing the Vale group of taking advantage of the global crisis and lower profits to make underhanded cuts in employees' wages, pension plans and social assistance programs. They are also organizing visits to all of Vale Inco's sites in Brazil, Indonesia, Australia and New Caledonia, to create a sort of worldwide alliance between the various unions that represent the multinational corporation's employees.

### **Vale, too big to be defeated in a single country**

The strike at Vale Inco began in mid-July at Sudbury, a city of 150,000 inhabitants, one third of them Francophone. In early August the strike was joined by workers at the Vale Inco refinery in Port Colborne, on Lake Erie, and the mine at Voisey's Bay in Labrador. Vale is engaged in a frenzied competition with BHP-Billiton, an Australian-British company and the world's largest, Rio Tinto, the third largest, and other mining giants in a process of concentration and centralization of the international mining industry. They are seeking to profit from the exponential rise in metal prices in recent years as a result of the explosive growth in demand in the emerging economies, and to strengthen their position with the major purchasers, above all the Chinese government and the big new producers in those countries.

In a push for diversification, Vale, a leading iron ore producer, purchased the Canadian nickel transnational Inco two years ago. The current economic crisis suddenly forced down raw materials prices, particularly for nickel. Vale, which had earlier settled for contract improvements with its employees in Thompson, Manitoba, is now demanding that its other workers agree to a three-year wage freeze, a defined contributions pension plan for new hires (the current plan is defined benefits), a major reduction in the annual production bonus (which has averaged 25% of the base wage), now to be pegged to the firm's profitability, and a weaker wage indexation clause.

But unlike its major rivals, who have experienced liquidity problems resulting in major layoffs – Rio Tinto-Alcan in Quebec, for example – Vale has remained quite profitable despite the collapse in prices and has not carried out massive layoffs, although it did dismiss a few hundred Inco employees after buying this company. In Brazil itself, it plans to increase its workforce by 12% in 2010 following major investments demanded by the Brazilian government; the state-owned banks are significant financiers of Vale. In Brazil, as in New Caledonia, wages are lower, and perhaps the environmental constraints as well.

In 2008 Vale made a profit of US\$13.2 billion. Its subsidiary Vale Inco made more profits in two years (2006-2008) than Inco did in ten (1996-2006): US\$4.1 billion. In the third quarter of 2009, together with the new rise in nickel and iron ore prices, its profit doubled from the previous quarter although it was only a third of what it was in the same period in 2008. The company was so proud of this result that its directors had planned to go to the New York and London stock exchanges for media events in late October. Unfortunately for them, they had to cancel when small delegations of strikers came to disrupt the events with the help of local union members linked with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) – about twenty strikers in New York supported by U.S. steelworkers but also some teachers.

Vale was so optimistic at that point that it announced it would be distributing \$2.75 billion in dividends in 2009 – more than the cost of the wages and benefits of its 100,000 plus employees in 35 countries worldwide. But the strike has been relatively effective. Nickel production in the third quarter of 2009 is down by 45% from the second quarter and by 55% from the equivalent quarter in 2008, not to mention the direct cost of \$200 million for the strike. However, the new rise in nickel prices has somewhat offset the lower volume, and the production of nickel (and copper, which Vale Inco extracts concurrently) is a marginal component of the transnational's overall operations, while it was central for the old Inco.

### **Vale profits from the severity of the crisis in Ontario**

Since its privatization in 1997 – it was a state-owned corporation in Brazil, founded during the Second World War – Vale has been systematically fighting its workers. In Brazil, its employees have no job security; the company dismisses them without cause and fires most once they have three to five years seniority in order to hire at a lower wage, which explains why the majority are on fixed-term contracts. In the current strike in Canada, Vale has hired strikebreakers and required its other workers to do the work of the strikers. The New Democratic Party sought unsuccessfully in the Ontario legislature, with the applause of strikers in the visitors' gallery,

who were expelled, to present anti-scab legislation like that in Quebec. The NDP, a social-liberal party linked to the trade-union movement, is the most left-wing party in the Ontario legislature. It divides the northern and northeastern seats, which are very blue-collar, especially outside the few major urban areas, with the governing Liberals, although it has only 10 out of the province's 107 MPPs.

The relative isolation of the strikers from the major metropolitan centers in the south of the province has not facilitated efforts to build solidarity. However, it is worth noting the solidarity of other Steelworkers locals and the Ontario branch of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), known for its vanguard role in the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign in support of Palestine, and for its municipal worker locals in Toronto and Windsor, which waged hard-fought strikes this summer to fend off concessions demanded by the municipal authorities including the so-called progressive city council in Toronto. These politicians sought to benefit from the crisis in the automobile, steel and financial industries that has hit hard at the Ontario economy, which accounts for 40% of the Canadian GNP. It is no accident that the conflict at Vale Inco began this summer while these major strikes were taking place.

Nevertheless, this solidarity consists at best in visits by a few leaders, sometimes with cheques in support, and the mobilization of limited pockets of militants when strikers visit Toronto, for example to agitate at Queen's Park, the site of the Ontario legislature, or to respond to the invitation of the iconoclastic film director Michael Moore when he was in Toronto for the premiere of *Capitalism, a love story*. Until quite recently the international mobilization has remained quite modest: letters of support from unions in less than a dozen countries and tours in Germany and Sweden accompanied by international leaders to convince certain companies not to import nickel ore from Vale. Even the big rally in late September with international guests, including the president of the CUT, the major Brazilian trade-union central, drew only 3,000 persons, slightly less than the total number of strikers in Sudbury.

### **A possible turning-point in October**

It appears, however, that things took a turn for the better in October. The women's strike support committee, which played such an important role in the very militant nine-month strike in 1978-79, was re-established with the help of former activists. Working with the recently constituted support committee, it will be organizing a series of family activities in November. The Ukrainian community in the region has also become involved. The spirit of 1978-79 could be regained. There appear to be some changes as well in terms of international solidarity. In addition to the trip to New York, a small delegation has returned from Australia, where Vale purchased several coal mines in 2007, and New Caledonia, where Vale Inco will soon open a new nickel mine. Dozens of Australian miners expressed their sympathy with the delegation, as did their leaders. But their contract terminates only in 2011.

In New Caledonia, there was remarkable media coverage and a warm reception from the Kanak elected representatives. The Kanaks are the first nation in this French colony, although they now make up only 45% of the total population. Did the Kanaks sense they had a lot in common with the Franco-Ontarians in the delegation – two nationalities suffering oppression of their language,

their economic conditions and their lack of territorial autonomy? Oddly enough, the Steelworkers web site devoted to this conflict, from which most of the information in this article is derived, is bilingual – in English and Brazilian Portuguese. And the publication materials are English-only. But the Sudbury region itself is strongly Francophone, and is not far from the Quebec border. Will this uniform and formal unity strengthen the capacity for mass mobilization? Is this the best way to build a pan-Canadian movement? Internationalism, to be effective, must begin at home.

It is in Brazil, Vale's economic base by far, where the situation is most promising. The miners in the company's largest Brazilian mine, and two other mines, staged a two-day strike, October 26-27, around their own demands. A few days later, at two other mines affiliated with the smallest union central, Conlutas, which is known for its militancy, the bargaining committee symbolically invited the woman representing the Canadian steelworkers to be part of their bargaining team, to the anger of the employer's negotiators who threatened to break off the talks. And 700 workers in these two mines signed a letter to the company calling on it to settle the strike in Canada, where negotiations have not resumed since the strike began. In a release issued November 4, the union's leaders said:

Vale fears more than just the possibility of victory in the strike by Canadian brothers and sisters, a possibility strengthened by this gesture of solidarity. It also fears the growing international unity which is being built among Vale workers and also people in communities around the world where Vale's profits have resulted in environmental disasters, degradation of the natural environment and community disintegration.

### **Internationalist optimism and bureaucratic contradiction**

This optimism is justified. But so far the development of international links has been primarily at the initiative of the union bureaucracies. Their willingness to develop an internationalist response should not be under-estimated. They have been caught off guard by this strike and the membership's willingness to take on a powerful transnational corporation capable of holding out through even a militant strike as long as the workers are isolated. They realize that the usual bureaucratic methods of bargaining supported by a national strike limited to picketing and controlled from above will inevitably result in some setbacks. When the union ranks hesitate to fight back in the face of a difficult objective situation, as in the automobile industry, the leaderships can force through some concessions. But there may be a high price to pay in terms of credibility once the threshold of an unlimited strike has been crossed. To defeat Vale, there must be a certain degree of international coordination in strikes, except perhaps in Brazil, where a national inter-union coordination might suffice.

The need for the union bureaucracy to mobilize the ranks to some degree, or to let them mobilize themselves without too many impediments, opens the door to self-organization. Has the women's committee given the cue? The need to develop international links and an openness toward working-class internationalism, particularly with the Brazilian unions, forces the bureaucrats to restrain any temptation to engage in the kind of chauvinist language characteristic of a small imperialist power that we hear so often in Canada – “defending our middle-class, anti-

ecology status” while allowing Vale to chip away at the wage scales and working conditions of its employees elsewhere.

The Steelworkers are styled an “international” union, although they have locals only in the USA and Canada. So when the “international” president of the union called for nationalization of Vale at the big strike support rally in late September, to the standing ovation of the strikers, there was a note of ambiguity. If nationalization means a takeover by the capitalist state in order to escape Brazilian living conditions, that is a setback for internationalism – and an economic illusion, for the nickel market is worldwide. A state corporation would do as Vale does. However, nationalization can signify the first step in the takeover by the workers collectively, as the Zanon workers took over their plant in Argentina. [A strike made famous by Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis in their film *The Take*.]

The self-managed collective would confront the state with the need to provide financing, technical assistance and guarantees of international markets, if not conversion of the company and retraining of the workers. It would make the undertaking an integral part of the community, and in the case of a firm that is intrinsically an exporter, would also link with the workers in client and competitor firms abroad in support of their demands and their struggles, within a perspective of collaboration for joint marketing in the context of a levelling upward of living conditions. It would be a first step toward internationalist self-management.

Irrespective of whether it goes forward or is worn down, this strike against Vale gives some idea of what the strike movement will be like in the 21st century. Global strikes against transnational corporations will be an essential pillar of internationalism. They are just beginning.

*Translated by Richard Fidler. The web site of the Vale Inco families and community members is Fair Deal Now!. See also “Down in the Vale: Sudbury Steelworkers Strike at Vale Inco.”*

Socialist Voice #374, November 17, 2009

## **Popular Resistance Rejects Fake Elections in Honduras**

**Introduction by Felipe Stuart Cournoyer**

In the following Communiqué, the National Front of Resistance Against the Coup in Honduras (NFRAC) declares that it will not recognize the legitimacy of elections proposed by the coup regime for November 29. Its statement follows on the breakdown of the “Tegucigalpa Agreement,” an effort to resolve the political crisis created by the June coup against President Manuel Zelaya Rosales.

It is unlikely that the elections and government issuing from the electoral sham will have any legitimacy in Latin America beyond the traditional oligarchic right, and governments like those in Peru and Colombia. The anti-coup candidate for the presidency has withdrawn. The OAS Secretary-General has said this body will not send election observers to Honduras, and continues to recognize Zelaya Rosales as the constitutionally elected president. Washington will no doubt come good on its pledge to recognize the electoral process, and Canada can be expected to carry out the wishes of its gold mining companies and back the coup regime to the hilt.

No one can predict to any degree of certainty how this struggle will unfold into the New Year, but there is no question that the old Honduras – the fiefdom of ten oligarchic families – is gone to the trash bin. The country will never return to those days. The National Front of Resistance is campaigning for a constituent assembly process to draft a new, revolutionary democratic constitution. This process can grow, through popular demonstrations and agitation, providing a great school for social change.

Meanwhile, the extreme right in the region is setting its sights on Nicaragua and El Salvador, howling that Daniel Ortega’s government in Nicaragua is installing a dictatorship and the FMLN government in El Salvador is plotting a coup to install a Chavez-type regime.

We are publishing both an English translation of the Resistance Front’s statement and the Spanish original.

### ***Communique #34 of the National Front of Resistance Against the Coup***

The National Front of Resistance Against the Coup declares to the Honduran people and the International community:

1. Since the midnight deadline of Thursday November 5th passed without the restitution of legitimate president Manuel Zelaya, we declare we will actively not recognize the electoral process of November 29 this year.

Elections which are imposed by a de facto regime that represses and violates the human and political rights of the citizenry would only validate nationally and internationally the oligarchical dictatorship and secure the continuation of a system which marginalizes and exploits popular sectors in order to guarantee the privileges of a few.

Participation in such a process would give legitimacy to the coup regime and to its successor, which would be fraudulently installed on January 27, 2010.

2. The refusal to acknowledge the electoral farce will remain firm between now and the elections, even if President Manuel Zelaya is re-instated. A period of 20 days is too little time to dismantle an electoral fraud conceived to ensure that one of the representatives of the coup-making oligarchy will be put in place and therefore give continuity to its repressive and anti-democratic project.

This statement does not mean that we have renounced our fundamental demand for a return to the constitutional order in Honduras, including the return of President Zelaya to the position he was elected by the Honduran people to fill for four years.

3. Now more than ever it is clear that the exercise of participatory democracy through the installation of a Constituent Assembly is not just a non-negotiable right but also the only way to provide the Honduran people with a democratic and inclusive political system.

4. We denounce the complicit role of the U.S. government. It has maneuvered to drag out the crisis and now shows its true intention to give validity to the coup regime, thereby ensuring that the successor government will be docile in the face of the interests of transnational companies and their goal of regional control. Therefore, we consider correct the decision made by President Zelaya to declare the failure of the Tegucigalpa Agreement, an agreement which is part of the U.S. strategy to stall Zelaya's restitution in order to validate the electoral process.

5. We call on all organizations and candidates in the November 29 elections to act in accordance with previously stated commitments and publicly pull out of the electoral farce.

6. We call together the mobilized and as yet unorganized sectors of the population to join actions that reject the electoral farce and promote acts of civil disobedience, as supported by Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic, which gives us the right to disobedience and popular insurrection.

7. To the friendly nations and peoples of the world, we call on you to maintain political pressure to overthrow the military dictatorship imposed by oligarchy and imperialism, as well as commit to recognize neither the illegitimate elections of November 29 nor the spurious authorities who seek to pass as representatives elected by the people.

**We resist and we will win.**

*– Tegucigalpa, November 9th, 2009*

***Comunicado No. 34 del Frente Nacional de Resistencia contra el Golpe de Estado***

El Frente Nacional de Resistencia contra el Golpe de Estado comunica a la población hondureña y la comunidad internacional.

1. Al haber vencido el plazo establecido para el jueves 5 de noviembre a las 12 de la noche sin haber sido restituido el presidente legítimo Manuel Zelaya Rosales, declaramos nuestro

desconocimiento activo del proceso electoral del 29 de noviembre del presente año. Unas elecciones impulsadas por un régimen de facto que reprime y atropella los derechos humanos y políticos de los ciudadanos y ciudadanas, serían sólo una forma de validación de la dictadura de la oligarquía a nivel nacional e internacional, y un método para asegurar la continuación de un sistema que margina y explota a los sectores populares para garantizar los privilegios de unos pocos. La participación en tal proceso le daría legitimidad al régimen golpista o a su sucesor que se instalaría fraudulentamente el 27 de enero de 2010.

2. El desconocimiento de la farsa electoral se mantendrá firme aún cuando durante el período comprendido entre el día de hoy y el 29 de noviembre, fuera restituido en su cargo el Presidente Manuel Zelaya, en vista de que 20 días o menos es un lapso muy corto para desmontar el fraude electoral que se fraguó para asegurar que uno de los representantes de la oligarquía golpista sea impuesto para darle continuidad a su proyecto antidemocrático y represor. Lo anterior no significa que hemos renunciado a nuestro reclamo fundamental de regresar a Honduras al orden institucional, que incluye el retorno del presidente Zelaya al cargo para el que fue elegido por el pueblo hondureño por cuatro años.

3. Hoy más que nunca se demuestra que el ejercicio de la democracia participativa a través de la instalación de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente no sólo es un derecho innegociable sino la única vía para dotar de un sistema político democrático e incluyente a la población hondureña.

4. Denunciamos la actitud cómplice del gobierno de los Estados Unidos, que maniobró para dilatar la crisis y ahora muestra su verdadera intención de validar el régimen golpista y asegurar que el siguiente gobierno sea dócil a los intereses de las compañías transnacionales y su proyecto de control regional. Por ello, consideramos correcta la decisión del Presidente Manuel Zelaya de declarar fracasado el Acuerdo de Tegucigalpa que forma parte de la estrategia norteamericana de dilatar su restitución para validar el proceso electoral.

5. Hacemos un llamado a las organizaciones y candidaturas políticas que se postulan para el 29 de noviembre para que muestren una actitud consecuente con los compromisos asumidos anteriormente y se retiren públicamente de la farsa electoral.

6. Convocamos a la población organizada y no organizada a sumarse a las acciones de repudio de la farsa electoral y a promover las acciones de desobediencia civil que realizaremos amparados en el artículo 3 de la Constitución de la República, que nos da derecho a la desobediencia y a la insurrección popular.

7. A los gobiernos y pueblos hermanos del mundo los llamamos a mantener la presión política para derrotar la dictadura militar impuesta por la oligarquía y el imperialismo, así como a desconocer las falsas elecciones del 29 de noviembre y a las autoridades espurias que pretendan presentarse como representantes electos por el pueblo.

**Resistimos y venceremos**

*-Tegucigalpa, M.D.C. 9 de noviembre de 2009*

Socialist Voice #375, November 17, 2009

## **Escalation of Afghanistan War: Canada Faces a Fateful Decision**

by **Roger Annis**

The United States and its imperialist partners are losing their war of conquest in Afghanistan and a further escalation is required. Such is the blunt assessment of General Stanley McChrystal, the head of the U.S. armed forces in that country. More troops are needed if the invading forces are to prevail, the general says. He is asking U.S. President Barak Obama for an additional 40,000 soldiers.

Canada's Conservative Party government now faces the thorny problem of bringing its policy into line with U.S. plans.

McChrystal's blunt assessment of the war was delivered in a series of extraordinary public pronouncements in early October designed to pressure the President into a sharp and rapid troop increase. Obama is purported to be weighing the matter, but the U.S. troop presence is already up 20,000 since his election one year ago. The October 13 Guardian newspaper (UK) reports that as many as 13,000 unannounced, additional troops are quietly on the way.

There seems little doubt that Obama has already agreed to a version of what his military leaders want. His closest European ally in the war, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, has agreed to boost British troop numbers and is stumping across Europe for 5,000 more troops from other NATO countries.

Australia and Spain are boosting their troop numbers, while the recently re-elected chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, is staunchly defending her country's continued role, despite rising opposition by the German people.

### **Canada caught out**

At the Conservatives' behest, Parliament voted in March 2008 to end Canada's military role in Afghanistan in 2011. Following the federal election campaign of autumn 2008, the re-elected Prime Minister Stephen Harper vowed that there would be no further extension beyond that date.

This was a stalling tactic to deflect rising domestic opposition to the war and to give time for the Conservatives to score a majority government in the succeeding election. But events are moving rapidly and the fudging over 2011 cannot be sustained indefinitely.

So the government is slowly beginning to back peddle. For one, it is voicing support for the McChrystal/Obama drive to expand the war. For another, Minister of Defence Peter Mackay told a Parliamentary committee last month that Canada would find a way to maintain its military presence by "shifting" its resources towards "development and reconstruction." He repeated that message while in Afghanistan on November 14.

### **A destructive war**

The war is going terribly wrong for Ottawa by any measure. Thousands of Afghans have died or suffered injury. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, have been displaced, forced into exile and otherwise lost their livelihoods. The International Committee of the Red Cross says that violence has reached “stunning and dramatic levels.”

Afghan resistance fighters control more territory than ever, and there are few areas where foreign troops are safe from attack. During the last four months, monthly death rates for foreign soldiers are higher than at any other time since the U.S. invaded the country in 2001. Fifty-five U.S. soldiers were killed in October, the highest monthly number ever.

The war is also spilling over into Pakistan, causing untold mayhem and violence. Bombings and missile attacks by U.S. drone (pilotless) aircraft are provoking popular outrage, to the point where even the quasi-military Pakistan government has criticized their use.

The presidential election that took place in Afghanistan in August was intended to provide a democratic façade to the foreign-controlled government in Kabul under Hamid Karzai. But it was a complete fiasco. Karzai and his supporters committed massive fraud. With hundreds of thousands of tainted ballots nullified, Karzai failed to carry the first-round ballot with the required absolute majority. On November 1, his main opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, withdrew from the second round vote, saying a fair election was impossible.

Nonetheless, the stakes in the war remain the same for the U.S. and its allies – securing Afghanistan as a reliable transit route for Central Asian oil and gas, and establishing a permanent and geographically proximate threat to competing regional powers, including Russia, China and Iran.

### **Canada's quagmire**

Canada's war effort has stumbled from one setback to another. Popular fatigue, if not outright opposition, is deepening at home. A steady stream of news reports question the false claims of the war's backers that Canada is lending a “humanitarian hand” to the Afghan people.

Rangina Hamidi, daughter of the mayor of Kandahar, told CBC Radio One's *The Current* on September 28 that she was not aware of any Canadian-financed development projects in or around Kandahar City.

Hatred of the foreign occupiers is deepening as a result of indiscriminate killings of civilians. Hundreds have died from aerial bombardments; others from routine encounters. The latest killings by Canadians occurred on October 3, south of Kandahar, when soldiers killed two boys, 14 and 16 years old.

Other practices, too, are provoking outrage, including forced, night-time entry into homes in the pursuit of suspected resistance fighters, and the use of torture.

Canada's role in assisting Afghan authorities with torture exploded into the news in early 2007. The government was obliged to convene an inquiry into the practice by the Military Police Complaints Commission. But the government has successfully stalled that inquiry and is taking

legal action to restrict its scope, should it ever get under way. The military's top lawyer, Brigadier-General Ken Watkins, recently refused to testify before it.

Kandahar resident Gul Mohammed told the *Globe and Mail* in September, "We have good memories from Canadians and we have bad memories." In some places, he said, Canadians "killed the common people by bombardment and by attacks when they could not tell who was a Taliban."

Writing in support of a "new, counterinsurgency" strategy for Afghanistan, retired Major General and former chief of planning and operations of the Canadian Armed Forces, Terry Liston, inadvertently gave a damning summary of the foreign presence in Afghanistan in a November 11 op-ed article in the *Vancouver Sun*.

"The surgical air strikes and targeted assassinations, gently called 'counter-terrorism,' fail to suppress the hard-core enemy but cause enough death and destruction to incite an apathetic population to rise up angrily in its own defence.... Consequently, the Taliban are expanding exponentially..."

The array of special laws in Canada that accompany the Afghan war and broader "war on terrorism" have come under serious attack at home. Lengthy, costly, but ultimately successful proceedings by some of the victims of these laws have been won. The case of Maher Arar is a case in point – it exposed the participation of Canada's federal police agencies in international torture rendition. Arar won a civil suit and financial compensation for the suffering he endured while illegally imprisoned in Syria.

More recent cases have exposed the federal government's refusal to protect the rights of citizens traveling abroad.

A centrepiece of the assault on democratic rights has been the use of security certificates that allow for the detention of non-citizens without due process and date from prior to the 1991 Iraq war. On October 14, the Federal Court of Canada dealt a serious blow to this procedure when it refused to allow further stalling by Canada's spy agency in dealing with the five cases that remain active. It removed all remaining bail conditions on one of the victims, Adil Charkaoui. There have been no new security certificates issued for years.

### **'Counter-insurgency' means war without end**

A November 4 article by the *Globe and Mail's* correspondent in Afghanistan, Gloria Galloway, sheds some light on the scope of the military build-up that is envisioned by Washington and supported by Canada. She writes,

"An uncomfortable awakening has occurred among coalition forces in Afghanistan.... Coalition countries, including Canada, have indicated a willingness to follow U.S. General Stanley McChrystal, the head of the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan, as he changes the strategy from a classic 'stability operation' to one of counterinsurgency."

This new “strategy” was approved by NATO defence ministers when they met in late October in Slovakia, Galloway writes. She cites NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Ministers agree that it does not solve the problems in Afghanistan just to hunt down and kill individual terrorists. What we need is a much broader strategy which stabilizes the whole Afghan society.”

Galloway explains, “A counterinsurgency demands huge numbers of troops to secure an area and stay until the population can fend for itself.”

### **Post-2011 in Afghanistan?**

A host of obstacles confront the Conservative and Liberal parties as they look ahead to post-2011 in Afghanistan. Growing public weariness, if not opposition, is one. Scott Taylor, an ex-serviceman and editor of *Esprit de Corps*, a publication aimed at soldiers, writes a weekly column in the Halifax Chronicle Herald; his September 21 column was headlined “Only a Village Idiot Can Remain Hopeful in Afghanistan.”

The *Globe and Mail*'s Margaret Wentz wrote on September 17, “Iraq was the product of neo-con delusions. Afghanistan is in many ways the product of liberal delusions.”

Serious questions have arisen over the toll that the war is taking on Canada's military. It has lost 133 soldiers to date, the highest number of deaths, proportionately, of all the occupation forces. Retired Major-General Lewis Mackenzie wrote last December that there is no chance Canada could keep a force of combat soldiers there. “Parts of the army are broken ... they're having a bitch of a time putting together a battle group (1,000 soldiers) now, let alone a couple of years from now.”

On November 9, Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Walt Natynczyk contradicted recent government fudging by declaring he is beginning to plan the complete withdrawal of Canadian soldiers by July. It's not clear whether his declaration signals alarm over the toll that the war is taking on Canadian forces or is a pressure tactic on the government to abandon the 2011 end date.

### **An antiwar movement**

According to a poll sponsored by the CBC and published in September, opposition in Canada to the war in Afghanistan is higher than at any time since 2002. Fifty-six per cent of respondents were “strongly opposed” or “somewhat opposed.” Only 41 per cent expressed support.

Herein lies a paradox of politics in many of the invading countries in the Afghan war, including in the United States itself. The war is more unpopular than ever, yet numbers at antiwar protests have stagnated or grown smaller. (An important exception took place in London, England on October 24 when as many as 10,000 people marched against the war and its escalation.)

A key explanation for the paradox in Canada is the softening of antiwar politics by the social-democratic New Democratic Party and many of its trade union affiliates. The NDP has always fudged its opposition to the war, couching it in terms of replacing Canada's military role with a “development” role. Last year, for a time, it abandoned entirely its call for an end to Canada's

“combat role” in Afghanistan when the prospect of replacing the Conservative government with a coalition government of the NDP and Liberal Party arose. The Liberals took Canada into the war in 2001 and deepened that course in 2005.

The coalition moment passed when the Liberals turned their back on it, but the NDP leadership has remained largely mute on Afghanistan, in the vain hope that it will play a role in a future Liberal-led minority government.

Opponents of the war in Canada have an exceptional opportunity in the coming weeks to take an antiwar message far and wide. Afghan Member of Parliament, antiwar spokesperson and champion of Afghan womens’ rights, Malalai Joya, will speak in seven cities across Canada in November. She has just published a memoir of her life, *A Woman Among Warlords*, co-authored with Canadian antiwar activist Derrick O’Keefe.

In a recent interview, Joya explained:

“The people of Afghanistan do not want more troops...

“First of all, it is the right of my people to say that. Secondly, we believe that no nation can bring liberation in another nation. Today’s situation, this eight-year disaster, is a good example of what war and occupation does.

“People say that if the U.S. withdraws, there will be a civil war. My message to people who say that is that there already is a civil war, and as long as these troops are in Afghanistan, the longer the civil war will be.”

*Roger Annis is an aerospace worker in Vancouver. For ongoing news and reports of the situation in Afghanistan, follow the November 23, 2009 blog of the Vancouver antiwar coalition, [Stopwar.ca](http://Stopwar.ca).*

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## **Eyes on the Maobadi: Four Reasons Nepal's Revolution Matters**

**By Mike Ely**

*LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion.*

*This article was first published in June 2008, on Kasama, a website that has featured extensive discussions of the Nepaese struggle, primarily from Maoist perspectives. The author, who gave permission to repost the article here, also manages the website Revolution in South Asia.*

Something remarkable is happening. A whole generation of people has never seen a radical, secular, revolutionary movement rise with popular support. And yet here it is – in Nepal today.

This movement has overthrown Nepal's hated King Gyanendra and abolished the medieval monarchy. It has created a revolutionary army that now squares off with the old King's army. It has built parallel political power in remote rural areas over a decade of guerrilla war – undermining feudal traditions like the caste system. It has gathered broad popular support and emerged as the leading force of an unprecedented Constituent Assembly (CA). And it has done all this under the radical banner of Maoist communism – advocating a fresh attempt at socialism and a classless society around the world.

People in Nepal call these revolutionaries the Maobadi.

Another remarkable thing is the silence surrounding all this. There has been very little reporting about the intense moments now unfolding in Nepal, or about the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) that stand at their center. Meanwhile, the nearby Tibetan uprisings against abuses by China's government got non-stop coverage.

There are obvious reasons for this silence. The Western media isn't thrilled when people in one of the world's poorest countries throw their support behind one of the world's most radical movements.

But clearly many alternative news sources don't quite know what to make of the Nepali revolution. The Maobadi's mix of communist goals and non-dogmatic methods disturb a lot of leftist assumptions too. When the CPN(Maoist) launched an armed uprising in 1996, some people thought these were outdated tactics. When the CPN(Maoist) suspended armed combat in 2006 and entered an anti-monarchist coalition government, some people assumed they would lose their identity to a corrupt cabal. When the Maoists press their current anti-feudal program, some people think they are forgetting about socialism.

But silent skepticism is a wrong approach. The world needs to be watching Nepal. The stunning Maoist victory in the April [2008] elections was not, yet, the decisive victory over conservative

forces. The Maoists are at the center of the political stage but they have not yet defeated or dismantled the old government's army. New tests of strength lie ahead.

The Maoists of Nepal aren't just a opposition movement any more – they are tackling the very different problems of leading a society through a process of radical change. They are maneuvering hard to avoid a sudden crushing defeat at the hands of powerful armies. As a result, the Maoists of Nepal are carrying out tactics for isolating their internal rivals, broadening their appeal, and neutralizing external enemies.

All this looks bewildering seen up close. This world has been through a long, heartless stretch without much radicalism or revolution. Most people have never seen what it looks like when a popular communist revolution reaches for power.

Let's break the silence by listing four reasons for looking closely at Nepal.

**Reason #1: Here are communists who have discarded rigid thinking, but not their radicalism.**

Leaders of the CPN(Maoist) say they protect the living revolution “from the revolutionary phrases we used to memorize.”

The Maoists took a fresh and painstakingly detailed look at their society. They identified which conditions and forces imposed the horrific poverty on the people. They developed creative methods for connecting deeply with the discontent and highest hopes of people. They have generated great and growing influence over the last fifteen years.

To get to the brink of power, this movement fused and alternated different forms of struggle. They started with a great organizing drive, followed by launching a guerrilla war in 1996, and then entering negotiations in 2006. They created new revolutionary governments in remote base areas over ten years, and followed up with a political offensive to win over new urban support. They have won victory in the special election in April, and challenged their foot-dragging opponents by threatening to launch mass mobilizations in the period ahead. They reached out broadly, without abandoning their armed forces or their independent course.

The Maoists say they have the courage “to climb the unexplored mountain.” They insist that communism needs to be reconceived. They believe popular accountability may prevent the emergence of arrogant new elites. They reject the one-party state and call for a socialist process with multi-party elections. They question whether a standing army will serve a new Nepal well, and advocate a system of popular militias. And they want to avoid concentrating their hopes in one or two leaders-for-life, but instead will empower a rising new generation of revolutionary successors.

Nepal is in that bottom tier of countries called the “fourth world” – most people there suffer in utter poverty. It is a world away from the developed West, and naturally the political solutions of the Nepali Maoists' may not apply directly to countries like the U.S. or Britain. But can't we learn from the freshness they bring to this changing world?

Will their reconception of communism succeed? It is still impossible to know. But their attempt itself already has much to teach.

**Reason #2: Imagine Nepal as a Fuse Igniting India**

Nepal is such a marginalized backwater that it is hard to imagine its politics having impact outside its own borders. The country is poor, landlocked, remote and only the size of Arkansas. Its 30 million people live pressed between the world's most populous giants, China and India.

But then consider what Nepal's revolution might mean for a billion people in nearby India.

A new Nepal would have a long open border with some of India's most impoverished areas. Maoist armed struggle has smoldered in those northern Indian states for decades – with roots among Indian dirt farmers. Conservative analysts sometimes speak of a “red corridor” of Maoist-Naxalite guerrilla zones running through central India, north to south, from the Nepali border toward the southern tip.

Understanding the possibilities, Nepal's Maoists made a bold proposal: that the revolutionary movements across South Asia should consider merging their countries after overthrowing their governments and creating a common regional federation. The Maoists helped form the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA) in 2001, which brought together ten different revolutionary groupings from throughout the region.

A future revolutionary government in Nepal will have a hard time surviving alongside a hostile India. It could face demands, crippling embargos and perhaps even invasion. But at the very same time, such a revolution could serve as an inspiration and a base area for revolution in that whole region. It could impact the world.

**Reason #3: Nepal shows that a new, radically better world is possible.**

Marx once remarked that the revolution burrows unseen underground and then bursts into view to cheers of “Well dug, old mole!”

We have all been told that radical social change is impossible. Rebellion against this dominant world order has often seemed marked by backward-looking politics, xenophobia, lowered sights and Jihadism. And yet, here comes that old mole popping up in Nepal – offering a startling glimpse of how people can transform themselves and their world.

Some of the world's poorest and most oppressed people have set out in the Nepali highlands to remake everything around them – through armed struggle, political power, and collective labor. Farming people, who are often half-starved and illiterate have formed peoples courts and early agricultural communes. Wife beating and child marriage are being challenged. Young men and women have joined the revolutionary army to defeat their oppressors. There is defiance of arranged marriage and a blossoming of “love matches,” even between people of different castes. There is a rejection of religious bigotry and the traditions of a Hindu monarchy. The 40 ethnic groups of Nepal are negotiating new relations based on equality and a sharing of political power.

All this is like a wonderful scent upon the wind. You are afraid to turn away, unless it might suddenly disappear.

**Reason #4: When people dare to make revolution – they must not stand alone.**

These changes would have been unthinkable, if the CPN (Maoist) had not dared to launch a revolutionary war in 1996. And their political plan became reality because growing numbers of people dared to throw their lives into the effort. It is hard to exaggerate the hope and courage that has gripped people.

Events may ultimately roll against those hopes. This revolution in Nepal may yet be crushed or even betrayed from within. Such dangers are inherent and inevitable in living revolutions.

If the Maoists pursue new leaps in their revolutionary process, they will likely face continuing attacks from India, backed by the U.S. The CPN (Maoist) has long been (falsely!) labeled “terrorists” by the U.S. government. They are portrayed as village bullies and exploiters of child-soldiers by some human rights organizations. Western powers have armed Nepal’s pro-royal National army with modern weapons. A conservative mass movement in Nepal’s fertile Terai agricultural area has been encouraged by India and Hindu fundamentalists.

Someone needs to spread the word of what is actually going on. It would be intolerable if U.S.-backed destabilization and suppression went unopposed in the U.S. itself.

**Here it is:** A little-known revolution in Nepal. Who will we tell about it? What will we learn from it? What will we do about it?

*For more on the Nepalese revolution, see:*

- Achin Vanaik: “The New Himalayan Republic.”
- Analytical Monthly Review: “Nepal’s Revolution: Armed Struggle Made Free and Fair Elections Possible”
- Interview with UCPN (Maoist)’s Baburam Bhattarai and other coverage in Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal.
- Gary Leupp: “The Andolan in Kathmandu and the Revolution to Follow.”

Socialist Voice #377, November 25, 2009

## **Chavez Proposes International of Left Parties**

by **Kiraz Janicke**

*(Caracas, November 23, 2009)* Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has called for the formation of a “Fifth International” of left parties and social movements to confront the challenge posed by the global crisis of capitalism.

The president made the announcement during an international conference of more than fifty left organisations from thirty-one countries held in Caracas over November 19-21.

“I assume responsibility before the world. I think it is time to convene the Fifth International, and I dare to make the call, which I think is a necessity. I dare to request that we create my proposal,” Chavez said.

The head of state insisted that the conference of left parties should not be “just one more meeting,” and he invited participating organizations to create a truly new project. “This socialist encounter should be of the genuine left, willing to fight against imperialism and capitalism,” he said.

During his speech, Chavez briefly outlined the experiences of previous “internationals,” including the First International founded in 1864 by Karl Marx; the Second International founded in 1889, which collapsed in 1916 as various left parties and trade unions sided with their respective capitalist classes in the inter-imperialist conflict of the First World War; the Third International founded by Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, which Chavez said “degenerated” under Stalinism and “betrayed” struggles for socialism around the world; and the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, which suffered numerous splits and no longer exists, although some small groups claim to represent its political continuity.

Chavez said that a new international would have to function “without impositions” and would have to respect diversity.

Representatives from a number of major parties in Latin America voiced their support for the proposal, including the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) of Bolivia, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) of Nicaragua, and Alianza Pais of Ecuador.

Smaller parties from Latin America and around the world also indicated their support for the idea, including the Proposal for an Alternative Society (PAS) of Chile, New Nation Alternative (ANN) of Guatemala, and Australia’s Socialist Alliance, among others.

Sandinista leader Miguel D’Escoto said, “Capitalism has brought the human species to the precipice of extinction... we have to take control of our own destiny.”

“There is no time to lose,” D’Escoto added as he conveyed his support for the proposal of forming a fifth international. “We have to overcome the tendency of defeatism. Many times I

have noted a tendency of defeatism amongst comrades of the left in relation to the tasks we face,” he continued.

Salvador Sánchez, from the FMLN, said “We are going to be important actors in the Fifth International. We cannot continue waiting – all the forces of the left. The aspiration of the peoples is to walk down a different path. We must not hesitate in forming the Fifth International. The people have pronounced themselves in favour of change and the parties of the left must be there with them.”

Other organisations, including Portugal’s Left Block, Germany’s Die Linke, and France’s Partido Gauche expressed interest in the proposal but said they would consult with their various parties. A representative of the Cuban Communist Party described the proposal as “excellent,” but as yet the party has made no formal statement.

Many communist parties, including those from Greece and Brazil, expressed strong opposition to the proposal. The Venezuelan Communist Party said it was willing to discuss the proposal but expressed strong reservations.

The Alternative Democratic Pole (PDA) from Colombia expressed its willingness to work with other left parties, but said it would “reserve” its decision to participate in an international organisation of left parties.

Valter Pomar, a representative from the Workers Party of Brazil (PT), said its priority is the Sao Paulo Forum – a forum of various Latin American left, socialist, communist, centre-left, labour, social democratic and nationalist parties launched by the PT in 1990.

A resolution was passed at the conference to form a preparatory committee to convoke a global conference of left parties in Caracas in April 2010, to discuss the formation of a new international. The resolution also allowed for other parties that remain undecided to discuss the proposal and incorporate themselves at a later date.

Chavez emphasised the importance of being inclusive and said the April conference had to go far beyond the parties and organisations that participated in last week’s conference. In particular, he said it was an error that there were no revolutionary organisations from the United States present.

The conference of left parties also passed a resolution titled the Caracas Commitment, “to reaffirm our conviction to definitively build and win Socialism of the 21st Century,” in the face of “the generalized crisis of the global capitalist system.”

“One of the epicentres of the global capitalist crisis is the economic sphere. This highlights the limitations of unbridled free markets dominated by monopolies of private property,” the resolution stated.

Also incorporated was a proposed amendment by the Australian delegation which read, “In synthesis, the crisis of capitalism cannot be reduced to a simple financial crisis, it is a structural crisis of capital that combines the economic crisis, with an ecological crisis, a food crisis and an energy crisis, which together represent a mortal threat to humanity and nature. In the face of this

crisis, the movements and parties of the left see the defence of nature and the construction of an ecologically sustainable society as a fundamental axis of our struggle for a better world.”

The Caracas Commitment expressed “solidarity with the peoples of the world who have suffered and are suffering from imperialist aggression, especially the more than 50 years of the genocidal blockade against Cuba... the massacre of the Palestinian people, the illegal occupation of part of the territory of the Western Sahara, and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, which today is expanding into Pakistan.”

The conference of left parties also denounced the decision of the Mexican government to shut down the state-owned electricity company and fire 45,000 workers, as an attempt to “intimidate” the workers and as an “offensive of imperialism,” to advance neoliberal privatisation in Central America.

In the framework of the Caracas Commitment, the left parties present agreed, among other things, to:

- Organise a global week of mobilisation from December 12-17 in repudiation of the installation of U.S. military bases in Colombia, Panama and around the world.
- Campaign for an “international trial against George Bush for crimes against humanity, as the person principally responsible for the genocide against the people of Iraq and Afghanistan.
- ”Commemorate 100 years since the proposal by Clara Zetkin to celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8, through forums, mobilizations and other activities in their respective countries.
- Organise global solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution in the face of permanent imperialist attacks.
- Organise global solidarity with the people of Honduras who are resisting a U.S.-backed military coup, to campaign for the restoration of the democratically elected president of Honduras, José Manuel Zelaya and to organise a global vigil on the day of the elections in Honduras, “with which they aim to legitimise the coup d’état.”
- Demand an “immediate and unconditional end to the criminal Yankee blockade” of Cuba and for the “immediate liberation” of the Cuban Five, referring to the five anti-terrorist activists imprisoned in the United States.
- Accompany the Haitian people in their struggle for the return of President Jean Bertrand Aristide “who was kidnapped and removed from his post as president of Haiti by North American imperialism.”

*Kiraz Janicke is a member of the Australian Socialist Alliance resident in Venezuela. With Fred Fuentes, she represented the Socialist Alliance at the conference of left parties. This article was first published in VenezuelaAnalysis.*

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## **Chavez's Historic Call for International Socialist Unity**

**by Federico Fuentes**

*(Caracas, November 27, 2009)* Addressing delegates at the International Encounter of Left Parties held in Caracas, November 19-21, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said that with the capitalist crisis and threat of war risking the future of humanity, “the people are clamoring” for greater unity of those willing to fight for socialism.

Chavez used his speech on November 20 to the conference, which involved delegates from 55 left groups from 31 countries, to call for a new international socialist organisation to unite left groups and social movements.

“The time has come for us to organise the Fifth International,” he said.

This call is historic. It follows Chavez's call in 2005 that the only response to the barbarism of the capitalist system was to create “a new socialism of the 21st century.”

In 2006, Chavez made the historic call for the creation in Venezuela of a new, mass revolutionary party in order to unite all who were part of the struggle to transform Venezuela into one party. This led to the launch in 2007 of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)

The call for a new international is historic because of Chavez's authority: the head of a government leading a revolutionary movement to build socialism.

And it is a revolution that sees itself as international. Chavez has repeatedly said either socialism is built globally or there will be no 22nd century for humanity.

The call for a new international organisation builds on the history of the socialist movement.

There have been four previous socialist “internationals,” the first created by Karl Marx in 1864, which collapsed. The Second International was formed in 1889, but fell apart when representative parties sided with their own governments in the bloodshed of World War I. The Third International was founded in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. However, Chavez said it “degenerated” under Stalinism and “betrayed” struggles for socialism around the world.

Leon Trotsky founded the Fourth International in 1938. However, Trotsky died in 1940 and his followers never succeeded in building mass support.

A majority of delegates at the Caracas conference adopted a special resolution in support of founding the “Fifth Socialist International as a space for socialist-oriented parties, movements and currents in which we can harmonise a common strategy for the struggle against imperialism, the overthrow of capitalism by socialism.”

April next year has been set as the date for a conference to launch the new international.

Chavez repeated his call in his speech the next day to the congress of the PSUV, which began on November 21. He asked the congress “to include in its agenda for debate, the proposal to convene political parties and currents to create the Fifth Socialist International as a new organisation that fits the time and the challenge in which we live, and that can become an instrument of unification and coordination of the struggle of peoples to save this planet.”

Chavez said the discussion “must go out to the people, to the social organisations and other forms of popular power in the country.”

The PSUV, a mass revolutionary party in formation, will no doubt take up this discussion with full vigour. Likewise, left parties around the world will need to take a position on this extremely important proposal with the potential to significantly advance the international socialist movement.

### **Unity against imperialism**

The Encounter of Left Parties conference involved representatives of the old and new left. It included a number of old communist and social democratic parties from Asia and Europe, national liberation forces from Africa and the Middle East, and new left parties such as Die Linke (Germany), Left Bloc (Portugal) and Left Party (France).

It involved radical and left groups from across Latin America. Some of these are older, such as the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) from Nicaragua, and some newer, such as the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) from Bolivia and the PSUV.

The first day discussed the new imperialist offensive in the region. This is exemplified by the plan for new US military bases in Latin America and the military coup against the left-leaning Honduran government, which was in alliance with revolutionary Venezuela.

Venezuelan foreign minister and PSUV leader Nicolas Maduro said that imperialism managed to destroy almost all attempts to create a new model of society in the 20th century.

“There was only one experience that had the sufficient political, military and popular force, together with a revolutionary leadership, which was able to overcome all of imperialism’s plans: the Cuban Revolution.”

Maduro said new revolutionary movements and political leaderships have emerged this century, changing the face of the region.

The election of US President Barack Obama created hope and expectations across the world that new relations with the US based on dialogue would be possible. But he said this illusion was quickly shattered by the actions of the new administration.

Maduro said the US government sought to undermine the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), an anti-imperialist political and trading bloc that this year expanded to nine countries.

The coup in Honduras, a member country, was aimed at ALBA and carried out with US support, he said.

Shortly afterwards there was the US-Colombia military agreement for seven new US military bases in Colombia, “a powerful threat against the revolutionary movements in our continent.”

In light of this, Maduro said unity of progressive and left forces is necessary to create a movement for peace and justice with the power to make Latin America a “territory free of US bases”.

Jorge Marti, head of the international relations department of the Communist Party of Cuba, said today, “the left is not up to the challenge it faces”. He said this was why it was necessary to develop a strategy for united struggle.

Nidia Diaz, a veteran leader of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador, said it was possible right-wing forces could win coming elections in Chile and Brazil. But, she said, “if we only think about electoral victories and not in the accumulation of social forces for change, it is easy to paint a negative picture.”

She said it is essential that the left promoted Chavez’s proposal for “peace bases” as focal points for agitation and mobilisation of the people.

Patricia Rodas, the legitimate Honduran foreign minister in the government of President Manuel Zelaya overthrown in the coup, said: “We are merely spokespeople for our people who today are resisting.”

She said it was the responsibility of those at the meeting to build a common space for left groups to unite “and make possible the creation of a never-before-seen, diverse force”.

Venezuelan education minister Hector Navarro said: “The problem [we face] is the structural crisis of capital ... We are confronting the question of the survival of humanity.”

Therefore, he said, the conference must be seen as a theatre of operations from which to unleash a struggle in defense of humanity.

### **‘International of the 21st century’**

The second day started with a discussion on what sort of international coordination of the left was needed.

Valtar Pomar, international relations secretary of the Brazilian Workers’ Party (PT), outlined the position of his party, currently in government. He put forward a strategy focused on unity around regional integration and a broad-based “anti-imperialism.”

He said if socialism became our lowest common denominator for unity, this would inevitably lead to division. Pomar said the PT would prioritise the Sao Paulo Forum (FSP).

The FSP was formed in the 1990s as an initiative of the PT to regroup the Latin American left after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The FSP, like the PT, has drifted from its radical roots and become dominated by more moderate forces.

However, PSUV leader Aristobulo Isturiz said the left needs more dynamic and active spaces than the FSP.

Chavez's speech that might marked a dividing line: "Yankee imperialism is preparing a war in Latin America ... it has almost always been the case that the US has pulled itself out of a situation of crisis via war."

The conditions to build socialism are ripe, he said.

"That is why I ask that you allow me continue to go forward, together with those who want to accompany me, to create the Fifth Socialist International."

Chavez said it would be a new body without manuals and impositions, where differences were welcome.

He criticised the practices of the old Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which imposed its dogmas such as "socialism in one country" on its satellite parties internationally.

Chavez said this led many Latin American CPs to turn their backs on Argentinean-born revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara, when Che, who rejected Soviet dogmatism, tried to spread the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s.

Chavez said the new international should reject the failed projects of "real socialism" and social democracy. It should embody the spirit and heritage left to humanity by the founders of the first four internationals. It should also incorporate the ideas of past Latin American revolutionaries.

It has to be an international to confront imperialism and defeat capitalism, said Chavez.

He said it was also necessary to work together to create a manifesto to spell out the content of "socialism of the 21st century."

Chavez gave a swift and sharp response to a delegate's interjection that there already exist organisations for left coordination. There exist many spaces for discussion, said Chavez, but none for concrete action.

"We have wasted a lot of time, we continue to waste time, looking for excuses to justify our inactivity", Chavez said. "I consider such behavior to be a betrayal of the hope of our peoples."

The unity of left parties is needed, "but parties that are truly left."

Some delegates expressed their reservations the following day, arguing that at such a meeting it was only possible to agree on specific points. A deep programmatic debate was necessary before any deeper unity was possible.

However, support for the proposal was very strong overall.

Speaking in favour of the proposal, El Salvadorean Vice-President and FMLN leader Salvador Sanchez Ceren said: "We cannot continue simply debating ... we need to clearly define what it is that we want, and the alternative project for Latin America is socialism."

Sanchez's comments provoked a reaction from El Salvadorean President Mauricio Funes, who was elected with the FMLN's support. Funes distanced himself from the comments and said his government did not support 21st century socialism.

The delegation from the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) in Bolivia told the conference they had contacted the MAS leadership, including Bolivian President Evo Morales, who agreed the MAS should back the new international.

Ecuadorian minister of government and Country Alliance leader, Ricardo Patino, said his party had also agreed to participate.

Rodas pledged the active support of the Honduran "resistance" for the proposal.

The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) did not express a formal position in the meeting.

If the PCC backs the call, it would mean all the most important organisations at the head of the Latin American revolution expressed their will to create the new international.

The adopted resolution pledged to create a "working group comprised of those socialist parties, currents and social movements who endorse the initiative, to prepare an agenda which defines the objectives, contents and mechanisms of this global revolutionary body."

A main document, called the Caracas Commitment, was also approved.

The document said that faced with "structural crisis of capital, which combines the economic crisis, with an ecological crisis, a food crisis, and an energy crisis, and which together represents a mortal threat to humanity and mother earth," the only alternative possible is "socialism of the 21st century."

Speaking to the PSUV Congress, Chavez said the previous four socialist internationals had originated in Europe, "where the thesis of scientific socialism emerged with force in the heat of the great popular workers struggles."

Today, however, "the epicentre of revolutionary struggle is in our America. And Venezuela is the epicenter of this battle.

"It is up to us to assume the role of the vanguard and we have to assume it, so that we realize and become aware of the huge responsibility we have on our shoulders."

*[Federico Fuentes, with Kiraz Janicke, represented Australia's Socialist Alliance at the International Encounter of Left Parties. They also work in the Caracas bureau of Green Left Weekly, where this article was first published.]*

Socialist Voice #379, November 30, 2009

## **Canadian government rocked by accusations of abuse, torture of Afghan prisoners**

**by Roger Annis**

The Canadian government's war effort in Afghanistan has been shaken by new accusations that Afghans detained by Canadian forces were tortured and abused.

The charges were made by Richard Colvin, a highly placed diplomat in the Canadian embassy in Kabul during 2005-07, the years when Canada escalated its military role in Afghanistan.

Colvin testified on November 18 before the Canadian Parliament's Standing Committee on National Defense that he had sent more than 15 reports to his political superiors and the military high command warning that Canadian forces were complicit in the abuse and torture of Afghans it had detained. He said the practice of handing detainees over to Afghan authorities and then turning a blind eye to their treatment not only violated international law, but would also do incalculable damage to Canada's role in the Afghan war and its reputation among the Afghan people.

"Instead of winning hearts and minds, we caused Kandaharis to fear foreigners," he said.

"Canada's detainee practices alienated us from the population and strengthened the insurgency."

Colvin told the committee that virtually all of the scores of Afghans detained by Canadians from 2005-07 were ending up in torture dungeons. Many were not even connected to fighters resisting the foreign military occupation.

"Many were just local people – farmers, truck drivers, tailors, peasants – random human beings in the wrong place at the wrong time. In other words, we detained and handed over for severe torture a lot of innocent people."

His account echoes concerns expressed at the time by Human Rights Watch, the Independent Afghanistan Human Rights Commission, and others. Even the U.S. State Department in 2006 described continuing evidence of "torture, extrajudicial killings, poor prison conditions, official impunity, prolonged pretrial detention" and other human rights violations at Afghan prisons and detention centers.

Afghan Member of Parliament Malalai Joya confirms Colvin's account. During a speaking tour across Canada to promote her new book, *A Woman Among Warlords*, Joya told CBC news on November 24, "What he has been saying is what I've heard from my people."

She says that many of the victims are women and children, and many of those suffered sexual assault. "It's not new for our people."

### **Denial and cover-up**

Torture allegations against Canadian forces first surfaced in early 2007 in the national daily *Globe and Mail* and elsewhere. At the time, the Canadian government and military denied the accusations, but local and international human rights organizations confirmed them. Even the International Committee of the Red Cross, always reluctant to enter into political controversy, denied Ottawa's claim that Red Cross officials were watching over the conditions of prisoners and could protect them from abuse.

So the government tried a new tack: in May 2007 it announced a deal with Afghan authorities to prevent future torture and abuse, and promising to monitor prisoner treatment closely. (Of note, Canada's expressed concern about prisoner abuse only applied to detainees turned over by *Canadian* soldiers).

Colvin's testimony challenges the effectiveness of that deal. He says Canadian military record keeping was notoriously bad and that a regime of "internal censorship" was imposed on the diplomatic and military mission. Following the 2007 revelations, his superiors discouraged written correspondence as well as any public statements on the deteriorating political and military situation in Afghanistan.

### **Government, generals hit back**

The response of the government and military to Colvin's testimony has deepened the crisis. In brief, their strategy has been to deny and attack. Defense Minister Peter MacKay, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and other government representatives flooded Parliament and the press with the message that Colvin's testimony is unreliable and unsubstantiated.

Three of Canada's top generals who were in command in Afghanistan from 2005-07 also challenged Colvin's credibility when they appeared before the Standing Committee on November 25. Former chief of defense staff Rick Hillier called Colvin's accusations "ludicrous."

Hillier led the Canadian military when it expanded its military role in Afghanistan in November 2005, famously declaring that Canada's role would be to "kill detestable murderers and scumbags." In 2006, he described the mission: "We are the Canadian forces, and our job is to be able to kill people."

The general's testimony implicitly acknowledged Colvin's claim that innocent Afghans were being rounded up. He said it was near to impossible for Canadian troops to distinguish Afghans who are "farmers by day and Taliban by night."

### **Lawsuit challenges government**

Colvin's testimony might never have taken place if not for a lawsuit initiated by Amnesty International Canada and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association in February 2007. The suit argued that the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* must apply to Canada's prisoner and detainee policy in Afghanistan.

Federal courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada in May, 2009, rejected the suit but the courts did note that Canadian forces in Afghanistan are obliged to obey international law, including the Geneva Conventions on warfare.

The suit succeeded in exposing many documents pertaining to military and diplomatic operations.

The two litigants also initiated a formal complaint to the Military Police Complaints Commission. That process also has pried loose more information, but the government and military have successfully stalled the MPCC's work, including recently firing its head when his term expired.

There are now calls, including from the opposition New Democratic Party, for a public judicial inquiry into Colvin's revelations and other torture allegations. The government has resisted, citing concerns over "national security" and the confidentiality of information.

The government has also refused to give the Standing Committee such documentation as e-mail and written reports from Colvin that would corroborate or disprove his testimony and the government's and military's rebuttals.

### **A public inquiry?**

The main opposition party in the Parliament, the Liberals, would probably find a public inquiry very uncomfortable and even damaging. After all, it was a Liberal Party government that led Canada into an escalation of the war in Afghanistan in November 2005, and its support for the war has not wavered since it was voted out of office in January 2006.

The Liberals' leader, Michael Ignatieff, not only supports the war in Afghanistan, but has also supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq and defended the use of torture against enemies of the U.S. empire.

In 2003 Ignatieff, then teaching at Harvard University, published *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*, in which he argued that the United States was a "humanitarian empire" dedicated to human rights and democracy. The book provided intellectual justification for the Bush administration's use of torture and targeted assassination.

Canada's military and political leaders are also concerned. A public inquiry could expose them to charges of war crimes. Retired Lieutenant-General Michel Gauthier, who headed overseas deployment for the Canadian military in 2006 and 2007, voiced this concern when he told the Standing Committee on November 25:

"As we were sitting at home watching television, my wife and I were mortified to hear a member of this committee appear on a national news network, name me and three others by name, and state as fact that we had either been negligent or that we had lied – effectively branding us war criminals."

Two war crimes experts – Payan Akhavan, a professor of international law at McGill University and former prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal at the World Court in The Hague, and Errol Mendes, a professor of constitutional and international law at the University of Ottawa – told CBC Radio’s *The Current* on November 24 that Canada’s political and military leaders have good reason to be concerned.

There is a precedent for a public inquiry into the Afghanistan war, and it does not bode well for its success or utility. In 1993, the elite paratroop regiment of the Canadian military was accused of human rights atrocities in Somalia, including torture and summary execution of ordinary citizens. The regiment was ultimately disbanded. A public inquiry into its conduct, established in 1994, was summarily cancelled by Liberal Party Prime Minister Jean Chrétien in 1997.

One of the commissioners of that inquiry was Peter Desbarats, a former Dean of the School of Journalism at the University of Western Ontario. He wrote a book on his experience, *Somalia Cover-up: A Commissioner’s Journal*.

Commenting on the Colvin revelations and fallout on *The Current* on November 20, Desbarats said, “We haven’t learned anything from Somalia ... this is another Somalia-style cover-up.”

Desbarats says he doesn’t have a lot of confidence that a public inquiry will end up any differently than the one that he was part of, and pointed to the only appropriate solution to this political scandal: “We should get out of Afghanistan as soon as possible before it does some real damage to us.”

That’s also the view of Graeme Smith, a correspondent with the *Globe and Mail* and Canada’s most experienced journalist in Afghanistan. Writing on the news website *The Mark* on November 12, he said:

“Making the country better doesn’t necessarily require fighting the insurgents – in many cases, it requires working with them.

“Our soldiers have bravely followed orders in Kandahar. But they’re being swept aside by a tidal wave of U.S. forces, and this surge is likely doomed to bring the same results as previous surges. Canada should withdraw its battle group, and push its allies toward peace talks.”

Richard Colvin’s testimony adds a layer of complication onto an Afghanistan situation that is already difficult for the Canadian government. Its U.S. ally is poised for a significant escalation of the war, including as many as 40,000 additional troops, and an expansion of the war into Pakistan.

The Harper government, meanwhile, is saddled with a 2008 parliamentary resolution, adopted for domestic political purposes, that calls for an end to Canada’s military role in Kandahar by 2011, though it implicitly leaves open the possibility of military deployment to elsewhere in the country. The resolution also commits Canada to “a policy of greater transparency with respect to its policy on the taking of and transferring of detainees including a commitment to report on the

results of reviews or inspections of Afghan prisons undertaken by Canadian officials.” (For background, see “Escalation of Afghanistan War: Canada Faces a Fateful Decision” in *Socialist Voice*, November 17, 2009. )

The latest torture revelations will make it all the more difficult for the Conservative Party government, or a Liberal Party government that might replace it, to sell the Canadian public on any delay or reversal of the 2011 withdrawal commitment.

While a public inquiry into the latest revelations may expose more scandal, it is no substitute for building a sustained antiwar movement that fights for an end to the interlocked wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine. Only such a movement can end these reckless and predatory wars and help create the political conditions needed to end the regimes of permanent war that now rule in all the major capitalist countries of the world.

*Roger Annis is an aerospace worker in Vancouver. For ongoing news and reports of the situation in Afghanistan, follow the blog of the Vancouver antiwar coalition, [Stopwar.ca](http://Stopwar.ca).*

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## **Québec solidaire supports pro-Palestine BDS campaign**

by **Richard Fidler**

*(This article accompanies our full report on the recent Québec solidaire convention (SV, December 3, 2009). QS, a political party founded four years ago, has 5,000 members and elected a representative to the National Assembly in the 2008 Quebec election.)*

The 300 delegates to the Québec solidaire convention voted unanimously, with a standing ovation, to endorse the campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions “against Israeli occupation, colonization and apartheid.”

The vote followed a special presentation to the convention on November 21 by members of the Coalition pour la Justice et la Paix en Palestine, which is developing a campaign in Quebec in support of the call issued by 170 Palestinian organizations for an international movement in opposition to apartheid Israel. The Coalition comprises 17 – now 18, with the inclusion of Québec solidaire – organizations in Quebec: Jewish, Muslim and Christian groups, NGOs, the Quebec Federation of Women (FFQ) and a major teachers’ union affiliated with the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN). The Coalition maintained a literature table at the convention.

The QS delegates resolved:

1. To respond favourably to the call of Palestinian civil society;
2. To commit to active support of the campaign for boycott, disinvestment and sanctions until Israel respects international law and the rights of the Palestinians; and
3. To participate, with the other groups, associations and unions in Quebec society that are already involved in the BDS campaign, in discussions and actions concerning this campaign.

In the brief discussion following the presentation, one delegate noted the need to pressure the CSN and the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) to stop investing in Israeli corporations through their “solidarity” investment funds, which mobilize workers’ savings ostensibly in support of small and medium-sized businesses.

However, it was agreed that this convention would vote only on the principle of support, and leave the issue of how to implement the campaign to later discussion both in QS and with the other members of the coalition.