

Contents

- 445. A Handbook for Defenders of Free Speech on Palestine
Suzanne Weiss
 - 446. Why We Boycott Israel: A Reply to the U.S. Socialist Workers Party
Art Young
 - 447. Canada's Failed Aid to Haiti
Roger Annis
 - 448. France Must Repay Historic Debt to Haiti!
 - 449. Afghanistan Crisis Deepens: US, Canada and NATO Threaten to Extend War
Tim Kennelly
 - 450. After A Highly Successful Year, Québec Solidaire Starts Debate On Program
Roger Rashi
-

Socialist Voice #445, August 1, 2010

A Handbook for Defenders of Free Speech on Palestine

Anti-Semitism Real and Imagined:

Responses to the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism.

by Michael Keefer.

Canadian Charger, Waterloo Ontario, 2010. 286 pages

Book Review by Suzanne Weiss

Michael Keefer has compiled a timely and effective handbook for all those resisting attacks on free speech regarding the Israeli government's crimes against Palestine.

Anti-Semitism Real and Imagined contains contributions from eleven committed campaigners in the fight for freedom of expression, as well as position papers from seven well-respected Canadian social organizations.

The book reports on an extra-parliamentary committee named the Canadian Parliamentary Committee to Combat Anti-Semitism (CPCCA), established in 2009 as a lobbying venture by 21 members of parliament hostile to criticisms of the Israeli government's policies toward the Palestinians. It was established and funded privately, with representation from all four parliamentary parties, although the Bloc Québécois has since withdrawn. But it is in no way non-partisan. Rather, it advances an agenda to which the Stephen Harper government is deeply committed.

Evidence of bias

One of the book's contributors, Bruce Katz of Palestinian and Jewish Unity, asks why there are no parliamentarians of Arab descent or of Muslim faith sitting on this commission. "The list of names of those members of Parliament," he states, "includes a good number of people who are

associated with pro-Israel lobby and who have issued statements in the past which might lead one to believe that they harbour anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments.”

Keefer, a professor at the University of Guelph, Ontario, presents a well-documented, footnoted study, with ample arguments and evidence to counter the CPCCA’s effort “to curtail freedom of speech and academic freedom across Canada, and to stigmatize, even to criminalize, certain kinds of human rights discourse.”

The CPCCA’s founding premise, Keefer explains, is that anti-Semitism is “mutating into dangerous and unprecedented ‘new anti-Semitism,’” consisting of excessive criticism of Israel’s government. Jason Kenney, Harper’s minister of citizenship and chief spokesman on Israel, has ominously termed such criticism “even more dangerous than the old European anti-Semitism” that fueled Hitler’s Holocaust.

The CPCCA’s function is to rally support for this policy, which could potentially shut down democratic debate and criminalize, under section 319 of the Canadian Criminal Code (public incitement of hatred) and section 13(1) of the Canadian Human Rights Act (hate messages), or else be “silenced by judicial warrants of seizure issued under section 320 of the Criminal Code [hate literature],” Keefer states. The CPCCA has concluded hearings; its report is now pending.

Israel – a state with no borders

Many contributions to *Anti-Semitism Real and Imagined* take up the CPCCA’s contention that those who do not “recognize” Israel’s existence are implicitly denying Jews’ right to a “state of their own,” which the Coalition claims is an inherently anti-Semitic viewpoint.

This view is a “conflation of ethnic/religious racism with opposition to a state,” explains Toronto-based activist Karin Brothers. “Since the state of Israel has never defined its boundaries, what exactly is to be ‘recognized’? What do the rights of Palestinians amount to if they ‘recognize’ a state which then defines its borders as encompassing territory internationally recognized as Palestinian?”

Lynda Lemberg, co-founder of Educators for Peace and Justice, adds that “the equation of criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism provides a facade for Israel’s allies [such as Canada] who are simply interested in securing their political, military and economic interests in a Middle Eastern nation that is their chief broker in that region.”

In addition, Lemberg states, “allegations of the ‘new anti-Semitism’ distract us from addressing the humanitarian catastrophe in the occupied territories as well as the increasing discrimination to which Palestinians living inside Israel are subjected.”

The complaints about a “new anti-Semitism” thus serve as a smokescreen to defend Zionism, the ideology of building an exclusively Jewish state on Palestinian land. As Jason Kunin comments, it is no surprise “that for Zionists, the key to shoring up Israel’s image-tarnished in recent years by its murderous bombing of civilians in Lebanon and Gaza—is to prevent people from learning too much.” Kunin is a member of Educators for Peace and Justice and of Independent Jewish Voices.

For Bruce Katz, the CPCCA's approach "is subversive of the very essence of Judaism." The Israeli state "cannot itself be Judaism, and no amount of sophistry will make it so. The worship of the State as a religious object is quite simply idolatry."

I would add that far from identifying with the Netanyahu government, with its agenda of ongoing settlement-building on Palestinian land, we as Jews are logically drawn to sympathy with the victimized Palestinians, oppressed and despised, with no land to call their own, as was the case with our Jewish forbears less than a century ago in much of Europe. Jews feel the Palestinians' pain with greater urgency because the crimes against them are done in our name.

These testimonies are buttressed by Keefer's documentation that contrary to CPCCA's pronouncements, acts of anti-Semitism have not been on the rise either in Canada, nor is there strong evidence that they have been on the rise world-wide. Joanne Naiman, a Vancouver-based member of Jews for a Just Peace, explains, "Certainly most Jews in Canada can tell you of vile slurs, stereotypes, or biased comments that they have received or heard." But the "data indicate that the Jewish population of Canada is, overall, socio-economically advantaged, and that the number of hate crimes against Jews has been dropping." She asks of the CPCCA, "What then, is the 'problem of anti-Semitism' that your committee is asking governments to address?"

Racism against Muslim Canadians

An outstanding submission by the Canadian Arab Federation stands in stark contrast to exaggerated fears of anti-Jewish prejudice. Noting that Arabs are historically counted among the Semitic peoples, it reports that "there is an increased incidence of racism and hate crimes directed at Arab Canadians and Muslim Canadians, and there are not enough laws applied "to effectively combat and prevent the spread of this anti-Semitism."

Dr. Mohamed Elmasry, founding editor of the web magazine, *The Canadian Charger*, blasts the lie that anti-Semitism is endemic in Muslim society. "Egypt is the Muslim country with the longest history of coexistence with Jews living inside its borders," he states. To convince the Jewish people to immigrate to Israel, in 1954 "Israeli politicians launched a secret campaign of violence against Jewish businesses and blamed Egyptians for it."

Indeed, as several contributors note, the Israeli government's wars and oppressive policies are a major source of anti-Jewish feeling. Bruce Katz puts this well: "to claim that the State of Israel is the embodiment of all the world's Jews is not only a lie, but a dangerous one," it falsely inflicts on all Jews responsibility for this state's actions. If the Israeli state embodies world Jewry, "then all Jews are made to share a collective guilt."

Yet it is important here not to exaggerate. When Israel and its powerful allies claim that residents of Gaza are killed on behalf of all Jews of course, does lead many to feel bitterness against Jews. Yet Palestinians and their Arab neighbours have responded with great restraint. We know of no significant movement among them for revenge against Israeli Jews. If Israel stands today in peril, this is not because of anti-Jewish feeling but because of the aggressive and criminal policies of its own government.

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

Anti-Semitism Real and Imagined stands in solidarity with the Palestinian call for boycott, divestments and sanctions against Israeli Apartheid. Keefer suggests, in particular, that Canada stop being complicit with Israel's war crimes and "participate in an academic boycott directed against government-supported institutional contacts."

Toronto researcher Craig Smith sums up the book's message well: It is incumbent all of us who are "alarmed at the current Government's intolerance of dissent and willful ignorance of human rights and social justice ... to submit a criticism of the basic assumptions of the CPCCA."

As we near the CPCCA's submission of its report to the Harper government, this responsibility comes again into focus. In defending freedom of speech against the CPCCA and government, *Anti-Semitism Real and Imagined* is an essential resource.

+++++

An earlier version of this article was published in The Canadian Charger on July 28. "Anti-Semitism Real and Imagined: Responses to the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism" can be purchased by mailing a cheque for Cdn.\$23 to The Canadian Charger, or by making an online donation to The Canadian Charger.

Socialist Voice #446, August 6, 2010

Why We Boycott Israel: A Reply to the U.S. Socialist Workers Party

A LeftViews article by Art Young

When Israeli commandos attacked the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in international waters on May 31, murdered nine humanitarian aid workers and seized the cargo of badly needed supplies for Gaza, they touched off an international storm of outrage that continues to this day. The widespread anger has galvanized the international movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people, drawing in new forces and producing new initiatives.

Following the attack on the flotilla, Palestinian civil society issued an appeal to progressive forces around the world to redouble their solidarity efforts and to strengthen the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS) against Israel. On June 7 the major Palestinian trade union federations appealed to dock workers to refuse to handle Israeli cargo. They said:

“Gaza today has become the test of our universal morality and our common humanity. During the South African anti-apartheid struggle, the world was inspired by the brave and principled actions of dockworkers unions who refused to handle South African cargo, contributing significantly to the ultimate fall of apartheid. Today, we call on you, dockworkers unions of the world, to do the same against Israel’s occupation and apartheid. This is the most effective form of solidarity to end injustice and uphold universal human rights.”[1]

Workers in a number of countries responded to this call.

The Swedish Dockers’ Union, which had supported the Freedom Flotilla, declared a one-week blockade on Israeli goods and ships beginning on June 23. The union also called for “a general blockade of Israeli goods until the rights of the Palestinian people are guaranteed and the blockade of Gaza is lifted.”[2]

On June 3 the Congress of South African Trade Unions called for “greater support for the international boycott, divestment and sanction campaign against Israel, which is proving again to be violent and ruthless in attacking and murdering those who stand in its way. We urge all South Africans to refuse to buy or handle any goods from Israel or have any dealings with Israeli businesses.”[3]

In a statement issued the same day, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union, a COSATU affiliate, said, “we salute the Swedish dock workers for their blockade of all Israeli ships. We call for an escalation of the boycott of Israeli goods and call upon our fellow trade unionists not to handle them. We call upon our members not to allow any Israeli ship to dock or unload in any South African port.”[4] In February 2009, following the Israeli assault on Gaza, members of SATWU refused to unload cargo from an Israeli ship in Durban.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union, another COSATU affiliate, declared that it would "immediately work towards (making) every municipality in South Africa ... an Apartheid Israel free zone." It said that it would "engage every single municipality to ensure that there are no commercial, academic, cultural, sporting or other linkages whatsoever with the Israeli regime." [5]

In Turkey the dock workers' union declared that it would "boycott ships from Israel, which has become a machine of death and torture. In this framework, no member of our union will give service to Israel in any docks where we are organized. The Liman-Is union invites all unions and NGO's organized in our country and throughout the world to join this boycott and protest campaign." [6] Unions in the Port of Kochi (Cochin) in India also refused to handle Israeli cargo.

In the first action of its kind in the United States, on June 20 more than 700 unionists and community activists picketed at several entrances to the Port of Oakland, California, protesting the arrival of an Israeli-owned vessel. Two shifts of members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union refused to cross the picket line. The cargo was unloaded only 24 hours later, after the picket lines were lifted.

The protest was organized by the Labor / Community Committee in Solidarity with the Palestinian People, an ad-hoc coalition of local labour, Palestine solidarity, and social justice groups. Several hundred unionists responded to the call of the San Francisco and Alameda County labour councils and other unionists to support the action. [7] Statements of support for the action were issued by the Oakland Education Association, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions and the Cuban labour federation, the Cuban Workers Central, among others. [8]

Opposing the boycott

One group that did not support the action in Oakland was the U.S. Socialist Workers Party. The SWP is opposed to boycotting Israel. It reaffirmed this stand at its national conference a few days before the picket in Oakland.

The group first elaborated its position on the Palestinian struggle in a series of articles that appeared during the first half of 2009 in *The Militant*, a weekly newspaper that expresses its views. These articles argued that:

1. There is no Zionist movement today.
2. Anti-Zionism is a cover for anti-Semitism.
3. Israel's rulers plan to give up control of most of the West Bank and Gaza.
4. Israel is not an apartheid state.
5. The BDS campaign is not only wrong. It is anti-Semitic.
6. The democratic, secular Palestine that the SWP envisages must grant a special right of immigration to the Jews of the world. [9]

This line of argument places the SWP in the Zionist camp. To be sure, the SWP opposes Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, but the thrust of its argument is directed against the solidarity movement. It endorses the slanders advanced by Israel's supporters that anti-Zionism in general and the BDS movement in particular are anti-Semitic. The group also supports a privileged position for Jews in Palestine.[10]

A complete reversal on Zionism

These positions represent a breathtaking turnabout for a group that for decades unconditionally supported the Palestinian people and thoroughly opposed Zionism.

The SWP's previous position on these questions was explained in a resolution it adopted at its 1971 convention. The opening paragraphs of that resolution read:

“The Socialist Workers Party gives unconditional support to the national liberation struggles of the Arab peoples against imperialism, that is, we support all these struggles regardless of their current leaderships. Our foremost task in implementing such support is to educate and mobilize the American people against U. S. imperialist actions in the Mideast.

“Israel, created in accordance with the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish state, could be set up in the Arab East only at the expense of the indigenous peoples of the area. Such a state could come into existence and maintain itself only by relying upon imperialism. Israel is a settler-colonialist and expansionist capitalist state maintained principally by American imperialism, hostile to the surrounding Arab peoples....

“The struggle of the Palestinian people against their oppression and for self-determination has taken the form of a struggle to destroy the state of Israel. The currently expressed goal of this struggle is the establishment of a democratic, secular Palestine. We give unconditional support to this struggle of the Palestinians for self-determination....

“Our revolutionary socialist opposition to Zionism and the Israeli state has nothing in common with anti-Semitism, as the pro-Zionist propagandists maliciously and falsely assert. Anti-Semitism is anti-Jewish racism used to justify and reinforce oppression of the Jewish people....

“Zionism is not, as it claims, a national liberation movement. Zionism is a political movement that developed for the purpose of establishing a settler-colonialist state in Palestine and that rules the bourgeois society headed by the Israeli state today in alliance with world imperialism.”[11]

It is immediately apparent that what the SWP says today is the polar opposite of these positions. Contrary to Marxist practice, the SWP has neither acknowledged the reversal nor explained why in its view it is necessary.

Zionism and anti-Zionism

The first indication that the SWP had changed its position on these questions came in an article in the March 2, 2009 issue of *The Militant*. The article quoted SWP leader Norton Sandler as follows:

“Class-conscious workers should drop the term Zionism,’ in the current context, Sandler added. ‘There is no Zionist movement today. The reality is, it has become an epithet, not a scientific description; a synonym for ‘Jew’ that helps fuel Jew-hatred, which will rise as the capitalist crisis deepens.”[12]

Sandler’s claim that the Zionist movement had vanished from the face of the earth was so at odds with current reality and with the SWP’s previous position that it was challenged by some readers of the paper. Sandler’s reply appeared in the April 13 issue.

“I made these remarks at a January 31 public meeting in London. I was not addressing the history of the Zionist movement, or how the state of Israel came into being as an expansionist colonial-settler state. Zionism in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century was a bourgeois political current contending with the communist movement for the allegiance of workers who were Jewish. Israel was established in 1948, more than six decades ago. There is no Zionist movement today and there hasn’t been for a long time.”[13]

Sandler’s historical survey evades the challenge posed by the readers. He merely repeats his assertion of the non-existence of Zionism today and “for a long time,” as though the repetition is proof enough.

This claim is simply ludicrous.

Zionism — promoting the existence of an exclusive Jewish state — is a political movement that transcends religious or ethnic factors.

As the SWP’s 1971 resolution states, Zionism is the ruling ideology of the Israeli state. The founding principles of that state proclaim that it is a Jewish state — meaning that it is a state that claims to be the homeland for the Jews of the world and whose Jewish citizens enjoy privileges denied to other inhabitants. Israel is the dominant military power by far in the Middle East, thanks in no small measure to the support it receives from Washington. Israel’s ruling Zionists command an arsenal that includes between 100 and 200 nuclear warheads.[14]

Ever since the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the Western powers have favoured the dispossession of the Palestinian people, first through massive Jewish immigration to Palestine and subsequently through their support of the Jewish settler state. They have maintained this policy for nearly a hundred years because it was — and is — in the interests of these powers to promote the existence of an ethnically defined Jewish state, with special privileges for Jews, as a divisive force in opposition to the national liberation struggles of the peoples of the Middle East. That’s

why President Barack Obama and Prime Ministers Stephen Harper and David Cameron are as committed to Zionism as Benjamin Netanyahu.

Zionism is also a highly organized and influential international movement.

North America is home to many prominent Zionist organizations such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Anti-Defamation League, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, B'nai B'rith, the Zionist Organization of America, the Canada-Israel Committee and the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy. Right-wing Christian Zionists also actively advocate and raise funds for Israel. Supporters of human rights for Palestinians confront organized Zionist opposition every step of the way, from charges of anti-Semitism to hostile picket lines outside public meetings and disruptions during meetings, often organized by the vigilante Jewish Defence League.

In all these cases, Israel advocacy and support is based on Zionism — the idea that Israel must remain a Jewish state.

In the March 2, 2009 article quoted above, Sandler and the SWP allege that it is anti-Semitic to oppose Zionism. Their logic is rather peculiar since it hinges on the SWP's denial that Zionism exists. But the conclusion is all too familiar. It is the common coin of most defenders of Israel and its policies. Here the SWP finds itself in the company of openly reactionary forces.

To be sure, Holocaust deniers, rightist politicians and others — actual Jew-haters — cloak their anti-Semitism in the garb of opposition to Zionism. The crimes of the Israeli state, which claims to represent all Jews, facilitate the propaganda of these hate-mongers.

But it is a reactionary slander to tar all opponents of Zionism as anti-Semites. It is a slander first and foremost against the Palestinian people who understand only too well what Zionism means and what it has done to them. For decades they have struggled heroically to overturn Zionism, and their struggle continues today. The vast majority of the world's oppressed and exploited support them.

It is also a slander against the anti-Zionist wing of the Palestine solidarity movement, including the small but growing number of Jews who oppose Zionism. Forces far more powerful than the SWP have laboured mightily to make this label stick, but they have failed.

An end to Israeli expansionism?

In his April 13 article Sandler also expresses the view that the expansion of Israel's borders is drawing to a close. "The majority of the Israeli ruling class has given up the dream of a 'Greater Israel.' They are forced to opt for what they consider the only pragmatic solution — maintaining a majority Jewish state within borders of their own choosing. This is hardly the Zionist movement's dream of an Israel from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River." (Other articles published between February and June 2009 make the same claim.)

Here Sandler and the SWP merely echo the Israeli rulers who never tire of claiming that their only aim is an Israel with defensible borders living in peace next to a Palestinian state. This has

been Tel Aviv's mantra ever since it occupied Gaza and the West Bank in the 1967 war. Israel's *actions* reveal a different plan. Seen from the Palestinian perspective, history since 1967 has been one of unrelenting Israeli expansion onto Palestinian land and continual ethnic cleansing by the Zionist state. Approximately half a million Israeli settlers now live in the occupied West Bank, some nine percent of the Jewish Israeli population. The settlements, the wall, the Jewish-only road network, the draining of the water resources — these and many other features of the occupation are turning the West Bank into a series of isolated and dependent cantons. The settlement enterprise has not halted for a moment, not even during the recent phony temporary “settlement freeze” declared by Netanyahu under pressure from Obama. Meanwhile Israel maintains an iron grip on the Gaza Strip.

“Greater Israel,” Israeli rule from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, has been the reality for more than forty years — that is, for more than two thirds of Israel's existence. During this period Israel has steadily strengthened its hold on the conquered territories (although the Palestinians have resisted tenaciously and scored some successes along the way).

The reality of “Greater Israel” that Palestinians face every day is documented in countless reports from the United Nations and many other organizations, including Israeli human rights groups. But Zionist propaganda appears to carry more weight with the SWP.

No Israeli apartheid?

Another major article appeared in the April 6, 2009 issue of *The Militant*. “Israel boycotts and divestment serve as cover for anti-Semitism” was written by Paul Pederson, a member of the paper's staff. He stated:

“There are sweeping differences between the apartheid regime in South Africa and the capitalist regime in Israel—in terms of organization of labor, the character of the regimes, and the historical conditions under which they emerged. The attempt to paint them as the same simply obfuscates the real social and class relations in Israel and the tasks facing the toilers there to chart a revolutionary course forward. Applied to Israel the term “apartheid” is simply an epithet, rather than a scientific description of a social structure.

“Perhaps the most glaring difference between the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and the fight for Palestinian national rights today is the existence of a revolutionary organization—the ANC under Nelson Mandela—in the case of South Africa.”[15]

The first sentence asserts that “there are sweeping differences between” South Africa and Israel. This is an empty platitude. There are also sweeping differences between capitalist rule in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain. But there are also fundamental similarities, just as there are in the case of apartheid-era South Africa and Israel.

The second sentence is another platitude, asserting that the false comparison leads to false conclusions.

The third sentence states the SWP's political position — Israel is not an apartheid state.

This is a straightforward question of fact: is the Israeli system of rule fundamentally similar to the apartheid system in South Africa? Does it meet the common-sense or legal understanding of the term?

Israel was established in 1948 by the massacre and expulsion of most of the native inhabitants, who generations later still cannot return to their homes. It practices systematic discrimination against the Palestinian citizens of Israel, and structural discrimination against these Palestinians is enshrined in its laws and the entire legal apparatus. In addition, Israel rules over millions of other Palestinians in the occupied territories through a combination of measures that ultimately rest on its military control. These inhabitants are systematically deprived of their land, their water, and other resources to the benefit of Jewish Israelis. The Jewish settlers who live on Palestinian land enjoy full rights of citizenship while Palestinians are denied basic human rights.

This, in a nutshell, is the Israeli system of rule over the Palestinians. It bears a striking similarity to the system of apartheid in South Africa even if it differs in many particulars. (For a more detailed analysis see “Not an analogy: Israel and the crime of apartheid” by Hazem Jamjoum.[16])

In the course of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, large numbers of people around the world came to understand that apartheid is a crime against humanity that must be eradicated wherever it might appear. In 1973 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, which specifies that a regime commits apartheid when it institutionalizes discrimination to create and maintain the domination of one racial group over another. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court also defines apartheid as a crime. This statute came into effect in 2002, long after the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Of course the experts on what is apartheid, and what it is not, live in South Africa. It is no accident that many unions and solidarity organizations in South Africa have endorsed the idea that Israel is an apartheid state.[17]

One of the most thorough and authoritative studies of Israeli apartheid in the occupied territories was published by the South African Human Rights Council in May 2009. The 302-page report by an international panel of experts concluded “that Israel, since 1967, has been the belligerent Occupying Power in the OPT [occupied Palestinian territories], and that its occupation of these territories has become a colonial enterprise which implements a system of apartheid.”[18]

Today’s solidarity activists draw strength from this understanding of the crime of apartheid. They look at Israel in light of the experience gained in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and they are inspired by the victory that was won there. Their explanations of the Israeli apartheid system have been convincing and have helped to build the movement.

Returning to the article cited above, only one element of the argument remains. Israel is not an apartheid state, Pederson states, because the Palestinian leadership is not revolutionary.

It is, to say the least, rather bizarre to assert that the nature of the Palestinian leadership determines the nature of the Israeli state. Nevertheless, the assertion is revealing. It expresses how the SWP has come to condition its support for struggles against imperialism on its view of the leadership of such struggles. This provides a handy excuse for refusing to support them. In 2003 the SWP refused to support the large demonstrations against the war in Iraq. Its Canadian sister organization expelled supporters who argued that Marxists had a duty to defend the Iraqi people against imperialism by taking concrete action against the war. The SWP justified its abstention from the struggle by pointing to the bloody and reactionary record of the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Over the last few years the SWP has adopted a similar approach toward the Palestinian struggle.

Suffice it to say that this has more in common with dead-end sectarianism than it does with Marxism. The SWP used to understand this quite well. The 1971 resolution cited earlier begins with these words: “The Socialist Workers Party gives unconditional support to the national liberation struggles of the Arab peoples against imperialism, that is, we support all these struggles regardless of their current leaderships.”

Israel boycott, a growing and dynamic movement

As noted earlier, the movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israel (BDS) has made great strides in the past few years. BDS is now one of the most dynamic and fastest growing components of the international movement in solidarity with Palestine.[19]

Israel’s rulers recognize the power and potential of the boycott movement.

On July 14 the Israeli Knesset (parliament) approved the initial reading of a bill designed to punish residents of Israel who promote boycotts of the state or Israeli products. If enacted into law it will allow punitive fines to be levied against such persons. The bill is primarily aimed at Palestinians living in the West Bank and the small but growing number of Israeli citizens, Jewish and Palestinian, who form the “Boycott From Within” movement supporting the international boycott. In a speech to the Knesset Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced the Boycott From Within movement as a “national scandal.” Neve Gordon, a professor at Ben Gurion University who endorsed an academic boycott of Israel last year, has received death threats. Gideon Sa’ar, the minister of education, has threatened to punish any lecturer or institution that supports a boycott of Israel.

In February the REUT Institute, one of Israel’s most influential think tanks, published a report in which it warned of a dangerous decline in Israel’s international support. It urged the government to take more effective action against the forces promoting the “delegitimization” of the state of Israel, including the international BDS movement.[20] The institute devoted the June 10 issue of its magazine to a detailed analysis of the movement, noting that:

“the damage caused by the BDS Movement lies in its promotion of delegitimization towards Israel through creating the comparison — whether implicit or explicit — between Israel and the former apartheid South African regime. Therefore, BDS should be

viewed first and foremost as a tool to brand Israel as a ‘pariah state’ with the ultimate aim of undermining the legitimacy of its political structure.”[21]

Although only five years old, the boycott movement has scored some notable successes, winning increasing support in many quarters. National trade union federations in South Africa, Ireland, Scotland, Quebec, and elsewhere have endorsed the boycott, as have numerous unions in various countries. On July 22 the annual conference of Unite, the largest union in Britain, with two million members, voted unanimously in favour of a complete boycott of Israeli goods and services. Earlier this year Israeli Apartheid Week, an educational activity promoting BDS, took place on more than 50 campuses worldwide. The number of participating campuses has grown steadily from year to year.

Grass-roots organizing has been particularly effective in Europe, where a divestment campaign forced the French multinational Veolia to withdraw from a major transportation project in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israeli businesses have acknowledged a decline in their sales because European consumers are boycotting Israeli agricultural products.

In the United States and elsewhere, the movement is increasing its pressure on pension funds and university endowments to divest from companies such as Lockheed Martin, ITT, United Technologies, General Electric, Caterpillar and Motorola that profit from Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands while helping it carry out its war crimes. On June 2 students at Evergreen State College in Washington state voted by a large majority to demand that the college’s foundation divest from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation and that the college ban the use of Caterpillar equipment on campus. Rachel Corrie, an Evergreen student, was killed by a weaponized Caterpillar bulldozer as she attempted to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian home in the Gaza Strip in 2003.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa has been a particularly vocal supporter of the college divestment campaigns in the United States.

An appeal from Palestine

The BDS movement responds to an appeal for solidarity issued on July 9, 2005 by more than 170 Palestinian organizations, including trade unions, political and social organizations, and women’s and youth groups. The signatories represent the three components of the Palestinian nation — refugees, Palestinians living under in the occupied territories, and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The appeal from Palestine said:

“We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose

embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.

“These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people’s inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

“1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall;

“2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and

“3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in U.N. resolution 194.”[22]

The BDS call does not advocate a particular political solution to the conflict. Its approach is to develop a grass-roots mass political campaign in favour of these three basic pillars of human rights for the Palestinian people. This approach serves not only to overcome divisions among the Palestinians, it also stands on the universal principles of human rights that have animated the struggle against racism in South Africa, the United States, and elsewhere.

The movement took another step forward in 2008 with the formation of the Palestinian BDS National Committee, a broadly representative group of Palestinians that serves as the leadership of the international BDS campaign.

The rapid growth of the movement can be attributed to a number of factors: its origin in Palestine; the unity among Palestinians that it expresses; its new, rights-based approach to the struggle; its consistent anti-racism (which includes opposing Islamophobia and anti-Semitism); and the movement’s Palestinian leadership. The movement also offers many opportunities for grass-roots organizing of boycott and divestment campaigns as well as educational activities. As it has grown the movement has acquired experience and developed an increasing number of local leaders. It has also become more diverse, developing targeted academic and cultural boycotts of Israel similar to those used in the struggle against South African apartheid.

Israel boycott, ‘a cover for anti-Semitism’?

These developments have not gone unnoticed at the SWP’s headquarters. The group has taken up the cudgels against the boycott movement, waging a sustained campaign against it in the pages of its newspaper. Leaders of the group have denounced BDS in meetings organized to build the solidarity movement, from Israeli Apartheid Week to the recent U.S. Social Forum.

The SWP’s campaign is fundamentally dishonest. *The Militant* has not reported any of the basic facts about the boycott movement. The SWP has also chosen to ignore the appeal of Omar Barghouti, a leader of the Palestinian BDS National Committee, who wrote in a recent article that: “genuine solidarity movements recognize and follow the lead of the oppressed, who are not passive objects but active, rational subjects that are asserting their aspirations and rights as well as their strategy to realize them.”[23]

In the SWP's eyes BDS is "a cover for anti-Semitism." The article by Paul Pederson cited previously said this:

"In the absence of any revolutionary perspective, campaigns such as the anti-Israel boycott can appear to be a radical substitute. But, as the crisis of capitalism deepens, the "anti-Israel" character of these campaigns is simply a modern form of Jew-hatred. All who genuinely support the battle for Palestinian national rights must oppose it."

Not to be outdone, in his reply to critical readers in the next issue of *The Militant* Norton Sandler compared advocates of BDS to the Nazis:

"In London earlier this year the Marks & Spencer department stores and Starbucks coffee shops were targets of protests over the Israeli assault on Gaza. These businesses are supposedly Jewish-owned. ... *Jewish businesses were a prime target of the Nazis in Germany after 1933.* Why aren't U.S.-owned businesses targets during protests against Washington's Iraq and Afghanistan wars?"[24]

The SWP's allegation that the boycott movement is anti-Semitic and akin to Hitler's targeting of Jews in Germany is beneath contempt. It assumes that readers of *The Militant* will not try to ascertain the facts for themselves. But facts are more powerful than such slanders, and the facts about the BDS movement are readily available.

(For example, *The Militant* repeatedly alleges that boycott activities in the United Kingdom target the Marks & Spencer department store chain because the company's owners are Jewish. Like virtually everything else the SWP writes about the BDS movement, this is untrue. The Boycott Israeli Goods website lists seven major retailers in the U.K. that sell Israeli products. Each of them has been the target of pro-Palestinian protests in recent years. According to the website, Marks & Spencer has deep historical ties to the state of Israel. Also, "in 1998, Sir Richard Greenbury, then CEO of Marks & Spencer, received the Jubilee Award from Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. In 2000, the *Jerusalem Report* stated that 'M&S supports Israel with \$233 million in trade each year.'"[25])

Supporters of the SWP might want to reflect on the fact that the group's campaign against boycotting Israel places them to the right of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship in the U.S., which recently endorsed boycott, divestment and sanctions, and the Methodist Church of Great Britain, which has called on its followers to boycott all products from Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.[26]

A fateful leap toward Zionism

Already well on its way toward the Zionist camp, the SWP took another fateful leap at its national conference this June. *The Militant* reported that the conference featured a series of classes.

"One on 'World Capitalist Crisis, Israel, and the Roots of Jew Hatred' took up the need for a multinational, working-class leadership to fight for a democratic, secular Palestine.

Communists would fight for Palestine to be a refuge for all Jews facing persecution. Conference participants discussed how the call for a boycott of Israeli products is not a road toward winning self-determination for the Palestinians, but a dangerous concession to anti-Semitism.”[27]

This passage does more than repeat the familiar slander against the boycott movement. It introduces a new and far-reaching change in the SWP’s program. Its call for a democratic, secular Palestine now has a distinctly Zionist flavour — Palestine must be a homeland for world Jewry.

This has several major implications.

For one thing, what is it about Palestine that makes it the proper destination for Jews who may feel the need to emigrate? Why not the United States, Canada, or Australia, much larger and wealthier countries? Religious Zionists believe that Palestine is the Holy Land and that God has granted the Jews the right to settle there. Secular Zionists advance other reasons. Both agree that the Palestinians must not obstruct Jewish immigration and colonisation. But what is the SWP’s reason for selecting Palestine for new waves of Jewish settlement?

Furthermore, the SWP appears to give little weight to the possibility that “Jews facing persecution” at some point in the future might choose to defend their rights in the countries where they reside, struggling alongside the oppressed and exploited of those countries. It is Zionism, not Marxism, that insists on the need for a sanctuary for Jews in Israel/Palestine.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the SWP’s vision for Palestine fails to mention the Palestinian refugees, victims of Israel’s wars. Many of them live in dismal refugee camps near Israel’s borders. According to Al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Coalition, there are more than seven million Palestinian refugees. One in three refugees in the world is Palestinian.[28] Any settlement that deprives them of their right to return home, to receive redress for their dispossession and to live as full citizens in the land of their choice is an unjust settlement that will not endure.[29]

While barring all Palestinian refugees, Israel accords automatic citizenship to immigrants who are Jewish. The SWP appears to want to maintain this arrangement in some form in the new state that they envisage. Whatever else one might say about it, this state would be neither democratic nor secular.

Although a logical extension of the positions first developed in early 2009, the SWP’s discovery of Palestine as a homeland for the Jews and its silence on the Palestinians’ right of return marks a fateful leap toward Zionism.

Bending to imperialist pressure

The SWP’s embrace of Zionist arguments against the Palestinian struggle are the clearest and most extreme examples of the group’s steady rightward evolution. Unfortunately they are not an isolated case. A few other examples show the pattern.

For a number of years following the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, the SWP refused to support the anti-war movement. It wrote article after article criticizing what it called the “middle class radicals” leading the movement while itself doing virtually nothing to oppose the war and occupation. It also repeatedly condemned acts of resistance by Iraqi fighters to the occupation of their country.

More recently the SWP refused to support the Honduran people in their struggle for democracy.

In June 2009 the Honduran army staged a coup d'état, overthrowing the elected government. President Manuel Zelaya had angered business leaders by raising the minimum wage. He had also alarmed Washington by joining the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Latin America (ALBA), an alliance initiated by Venezuela and Cuba that conducts mutually favourable trade between Latin American countries, thereby weakening the U.S. grip on the continent. In Honduras workers, peasants, aboriginal people and other toilers mobilized in large numbers against the coup, which they understood was a blatant attack on their democratic rights. Their struggle continued for months, while Cuba, Venezuela, and much of Latin America did all they could to restore constitutional rule in Honduras. The Honduran masses resisted valiantly but ultimately were defeated by the combined power of Washington, the Honduran army and the local oligarchy.

The SWP urged its followers to remain aloof from the struggle against the coup, which it characterized as “part of (the) infighting between wings of the capitalist class.” The July 20 issue of *The Militant* also falsely asserted that constitutional procedures had been followed after the army “arrested” the president.[30] An editorial in the next issue declared that “the interests of Honduran workers and farmers do not lie in whether Zelaya returns to the presidency.” It warned against “the false claim by middle-class radicals that Zelaya’s ouster was a ‘right-wing’ coup ‘made in USA.’” The editorial also attacked ALBA.[31]

In August 2008 Georgia provoked a war with Russia, attempting to reclaim territories then under Russian protection. Georgia was an ally of the U.S., which had provided it with \$277 million in military aid since 1997. It had troops in Iraq serving under U.S. command. Soon after the war with Russia broke out, the U.S. sent additional supplies to Georgia. It also mobilized international public opinion against Russia. *The Militant*'s coverage echoed the imperialist propaganda. “Russian troops out of Georgia!” was the title of an editorial in the September 1, 2008 issue, which characterized the fighting as a Russian invasion and occupation.[32]

In September 2005 a Danish newspaper published blatantly anti-Islamic caricatures, provoking massive protests by Muslims in many countries. The SWP turned its back on their cry for dignity and equality and their outrage against the xenophobic intent of the cartoons' publishers. *The Militant* joined in the reactionary uproar against the demonstrations, smearing them as “often violent protests.”[33] The SWP refused to recognize that the protests embodied the fight against both national oppression and imperialism.

This is a pattern of repeatedly bending to imperialist pressure in times of crisis. It is a disgraceful course of conduct for a group that calls itself socialist, particularly one located in the United States, the heartland of imperialism.

Notes

[1] <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/712>

[2] <http://ibnkafkasobiterdicta.wordpress.com/2010/06/03/the-swedish-dockers-union-decides-on-a-blockade-against-israeli-ships-and-goods/>

[3] <http://www.cosatu.org.za/show.php?include=docs/pr/2010/pr0531d.html&ID=3395&cat=COSATU%20Today>

[4] <http://groups.google.com/group/cosatu-press/msg/a2ff0baff48201c4?pli=1>

[5] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1264>

[6] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1264>

[7] <http://www.laborforpalestine.net/wp/2010/07/10/blockade-dockers-respond-to-israel-flotilla-massacre-and-gaza-siege/>; and <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11348.shtml>

[8] <http://www.laborforpalestine.net/wp/2010/06/19/support-pours-in-for-zim-lines-picket/>

[9] This position was first expressed in June 2010.

[10] A Zionist blogger welcomed the SWP's support. "Communists Against Boycotting Israel," <http://www.thejudeosphere.com/?p=1388>

[11] <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/swp-us/24thconvention/zionism.htm>. Also available as a pamphlet by Gus Horowitz, *Israel and the Arab Revolution*, from amazon.com and pathfinderpress.com.

[12] <http://www.themilitant.com/2009/7308/730857.html>

[13] <http://www.themilitant.com/2009/7314/731436.html>

[14] Estimates vary widely. This estimate is provided by the U.S.-based Center for Defense Information, <http://www.cdi.org/program/document.cfm?documentid=2965&programID=32>

[15] <http://www.themilitant.com/2009/7313/731336.html>

[16] <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10440.shtml>

[17] See, for example, the statement by the South African Municipal Workers' Union quoted earlier in this article. Many other examples could be cited.

[18] "Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid? A re-assessment of Israel's practices in the occupied Palestinian territories under international law", Executive Summary, p. 5. Links to Executive Summary and full report at http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Media_Release-378.phtml.

[19] For more information on the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, see "BDS: A Global Movement for Freedom & Justice" by Omar Barghouti <http://al-shabaka.org/policy-brief/civil-society/bds-global-movement-freedom-justice> and "Pro-Israel Lobby Alarmed by Growth of Boycott, Divestment Movement" by Art Young <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/462>

[20] "The Delegitimization Challenge: Creating a Political Firewall" <http://www.reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=3769>

[21] "The BDS Movement Promotes Delegitimization of the State of Israel", http://reut-institute.org/data/uploads/PDFVer/20100612%20ReViews%20-%20BDS%20Issue%2016_1.pdf

[22] “Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel,”
<http://www.stopthewall.org/downloads/pdf/BDSEnglish.pdf>

[23] Barghouti <http://al-shabaka.org/policy-brief/civil-society/bds-global-movement-freedom-justice>

[24] <http://www.themilitant.com/2009/7314/731436.html>. Emphasis added.

[25] http://www.bigcampaign.org/index.php?page=who_sells_israeli_goods

[26] <http://epfnational.org/action-groups/epfs-executive-council-statement-on-divestment-boycott-and-economic-sanctions-as-a-means-of-nonviolent-resistance/and>
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.newsDetail&newsid=453>

[27] <http://www.themilitant.com/2010/7426/742650.html>. Emphasis added.

[28] <http://www.al-awda.org/faq-refugees.html>

[29] The July 26, 2010 issue of *The Militant* published an excerpt from a report by the SWP’s central leader, Jack Barnes, in which he states that a new, revolutionary leadership in Palestine will be built around struggles on many fronts. Barnes provides a list of such progressive causes. He does not include the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. <http://www.themilitant.com/2010/7428/742853.html>

[30] <http://www.themilitant.com/2009/7327/732752.html>

[31] <http://www.themilitant.com/2009/7328/732820.html>

[32] <http://www.themilitant.com/2008/7234/index.shtml>

[33] “Socialists Must Oppose Anti-Muslim Bigotry” by Sandra Browne and Robert Johnson.
<http://www.socialistvoice.ca/?p=91>

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.

Socialist Voice #447, August 9, 2010

Canada's Failed Aid to Haiti

by **Roger Annis**

The six month mark after Haiti's January 12 earthquake saw a flurry of news reports in Canada and around the world. The depictions of the harsh conditions still prevailing for most earthquake victims took many people by surprise. The relative silence of the media over the last few months led many to assume that the international aid effort had accomplished much more than it has.

On the eve of July 12, contradictory or exaggerated claims were made about Canadian government aid to Haiti. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and Canwest news agency reported that Canada has committed "more than \$1-billion" for Haiti. Yet only days earlier, on July 9, the Quebec French-language daily *Le Devoir*, and the English-language Canadian Press news agency, reported that Canada has not given a dime to the Haiti Reconstruction Fund established by the March 31 United Nations Donor Conference in New York. So what is the true record of Canada's assistance to Haiti since the earthquake, and what more needs to be done to assist the hundreds of thousands of victims who have received little or no aid?

The Numbers

In a July 9 press release, written as a rebuttal to the aforementioned *Le Devoir* and Canadian Press reports, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon and Minister of International Cooperation and Development Bev Oda stated that Canada contributed \$150-million to Haiti in the weeks following the quake. The ministers also said an additional \$400-million has been pledged to Haiti for the next two years.

At a subsequent July 12 press conference, the ministers upped the figure, saying that Canada has spent, or is committing, a total of \$1.1-billion in aid to Haiti. But their time frame of commitment predates the earthquake considerably, covering the years 2006 to 2012.

Other figures are also misleading. The \$150-million figure noted on July 9 reflected spending announcements in January and April. The \$400-million figure was announced by Canada at the March 31 UN Donors Conference. Media reports gave the impression that this \$400-million is Canada's contribution to the Haiti Reconstruction Fund (HRF) established at the conference. In fact, Canada's contribution to the Fund is listed on the Fund's website as "\$30-\$45-million" [funds listed are in U.S. dollars].

It so happens that \$30-million is the minimum payment required to secure a seat on the Fund's board of directors. The HRF's spending decisions are controlled by international financial institutions, the Fund's board of directors, and the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission. The latter consists of 26 members, half of whom are non-Haitian. It is chaired by former U.S. president Bill Clinton and Haitian Prime Minister Max Bellerive.

Few of the countries pledging to the Fund are in a rush to pay up. According to the undated pledge page on the Fund's website, only three countries have met their pledges – Brazil, Australia and Estonia, for a total of \$64-million (U.S.). Canada says it will pay up “soon.” But Cannon and Oda voiced a reason for their delay at the July 12 press conference. They said they are concerned by Bill Clinton's remarks the preceding week in which he criticized laggard donor countries for their failure to pay.

Cannon said: “I want to be able to, with Minister Oda, discuss with [Clinton] so that we scope all that out and get a better sense of what he means by those comments.” Canada's government has been telling its people that its response to the earthquake was swift and generous. Clinton's remarks were an embarrassment to it.

The Fund's total pledges amount to a paltry \$509-million (U.S.). The \$5.3-billion-plus figure which the international media reports as pledged to Haiti consists of promises by the world's governments and aid agencies at the March 31 conference, in all forms and covering the next 18 months.

For Haiti, there is a major concern with the promises. The record following previous natural disasters is that the majority of funds promised are never paid. There is every reason to believe that this will again be the case unless significant political pressure demands aggressive and meaningful reconstruction aid from the world's big powers.

There is another flaw in the international financial promises: very little aid is going to Haitian organizations. Dr. Paul Farmer of the prestigious Partners In Health testified before the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington, DC on July 27 that of the \$1.8-billion in earthquake relief sent to Haiti to date, only three percent was delivered to the Haitian government. Even Canada's outgoing Governor General, the Haitian-born Michaëlle Jean, was moved to say in France recently: “The time has come to break with the logic of aid that has transformed Haiti into a laboratory [for NGOs],” Agence France Presse, July 20.

Canada's \$1.1-Billion

Below is a rough breakdown of the \$1.1-billion (Cnd) that Canada says it has spent, or is promising, in Haiti:

- \$555-million for 2006-11. Status: Most of this money predates the earthquake. It largely has funded police and prison institutions as well as massively boycotted 2009 elections.
- \$400-million announced on March 31, 2010 and again on July 12. Status: Promised over the next two years.
- \$150-million for short-term earthquake relief. Status: Given to UN agencies and NGO's; difficult to confirm how much was spent, and where.
- \$30-45-million to the Haiti Reconstruction Fund. Status: Yet to be paid.

- \$40-million for debt cancellation. Status: Much of this dates from the years of the Duvalier dictatorship. It is owed to international financial institutions and is not “earthquake relief.”
- Sums spent on Canadian military and police agencies in Haiti. Status: Amounts unknown and unreported.

Additionally, the federal government has said it will match \$220-million of the donations that individual Canadians gave to charities between January 12 and February 16. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) said in New York on March 31 that half of the \$220-million, that is, \$110-million, is included in the \$400-million announcement. The other half, Minister Oda said on July 12, would go to “the continuing work of humanitarian development [non-governmental organizations] and institutions in their efforts.” In other words, it is not new money at all.

Several expenditures recently announced by Canada for police training and equipment as well as prison construction were not mentioned by the ministers on July 12 and do not appear in earthquake relief announcements by the government or CIDA. These include \$34.6-million announced by Minister Oda on April 8, and \$4.4-million by Minister Cannon during a three-day visit to Haiti in early May.

Presumably, the optics of police and prison spending precluded these expenditures from being counted as “earthquake aid and relief.” But such expenditures fit entirely into Canada’s ongoing policies in Haiti. Its “aid” spending since 2004 has principally gone to prisons and policing.

Furthermore, Cannon announced in Haiti on May 8 that unnamed international agencies had decided that Canada’s principal contribution to the UN mission in Haiti would continue to be in the realm of “security.”

Militarization of Aid

Such spending on police and prisons is not the first for Canada since January 12. The principal Canadian government response to the earthquake was to dispatch two Canadian warships loaded with nearly 2,000 soldiers and sailors. They arrived offshore from Léogâne and Jacmel on January 19 and 20.

At the time, this was touted by the government as a major earthquake relief operation. But as the March 12 *Halifax Chronicle Herald* later reported, the ships carried relatively few earthquake relief supplies and equipment. They were instead loaded with military personnel and supplies. The military operations performed only peripheral aid and supply tasks. The medical teams the ships brought did not perform a single surgery, according to a study by John Kirk and Emily Kirk in April. When the ships departed six weeks after arriving, they took with them their vital air traffic control and heavy lift equipment.

The Canadian military operation was identical in motivation to the much better known U.S. military intervention. Both were intended to stifle any aspirations for political sovereignty and

social justice that were dashed by the U.S./Canada/France-backed overthrow of Haiti's elected government in February 2004 and that might arise anew in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Furthermore, Haiti was "used as a launchpad for redeploying [Canadian] combat troops to the Middle East war theater," reported Global Research's Michel Chossudovsky on March 28. "Canadian troops initially dispatched to Haiti under a humanitarian mandate are being sent to Afghanistan," as was done with U.S. troops. Though the military convoy was announced as Canada's principal emergency response to the earthquake, the expenditure for it is nowhere listed in CIDA or government summaries of earthquake aid.

Aid Still Desperately Needed

Canadians who have recently visited or are still working in Haiti continue to express anger and dismay with the slow pace of reconstruction. *La Presse* reporter Patrick Lagacé wrote upon arrival in Port-au-Prince on July 9: "This is what strikes the visitor returning to Port-au-Prince six months after the earthquake. Nothing has changed. Or very little. Too little."

Member of Parliament Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough-Agincourt) wrote to Prime Minister Stephen Harper on July 20: "I have recently returned from a trip to Haiti. I was appalled by the living conditions of the victims of the January 12th earthquake. Six months is too long for victims to wait for the rebuilding process to begin," he wrote. "We must act now."

The Quebec-based *Architectes de l'urgence* ("Emergency Architects") says it has been waiting three months for funds from the UN and European Union so they can begin to construct shelters. "We still haven't seen a dime," says its president, Patrick Coulombel. "Six months after the earthquake, reconstruction has hardly begun," he told Agnes Gruda of *La Presse*, as reported on July 9. "This is completely abnormal."

On July 12, *CBC News* cited Hans van Dillen, head of mission for Doctors Without Borders, as follows: "What we see when we drive around Port-au-Prince is that the situation is pretty much as it was after the earthquake."

"Removing the rubble left behind by this disaster, reaching remote areas with building materials, and obtaining permissions to build from landowners remain our main challenges to providing sturdy shelter for families," Conrad Sauvé, secretary general of the Canadian Red Cross, told the same *CBC* news report.

Two of the most pressing needs in Haiti today are the clearing of rubble from the streets and neighbourhoods, and the construction of temporary or permanent shelter. According to UN agencies, 125,000 durable shelters are needed, but only 5,000 have been constructed.

With all of the equipment and resources available in wealthy countries like Canada, such immediate needs should be well on the road to being met. Yet, they persist. It is a testimony to the failure of will and good intentions of the world's wealthy governments.

According to *CBC News*, observers say it could take 20 years to clear the rubble from the cities in the earthquake zone. The Haitian people, of course, will not wait that long. They are speaking

out, protesting and taking reconstruction into their own hands wherever possible. All signs point to a deepening effort by the Haitian people to take their destiny back into their hands and launch the reconstruction effort that their foreign overseers are so demonstrably unable to lead. •

Roger Annis is an editor of Socialist Voice and a coordinator of the Canada Haiti Action Network in Vancouver BC.

Socialist Voice #448, August 16, 2010

France Must Repay Historic Debt to Haiti!

Below is an English translation of an open letter to the French government published in the August 16 French daily *Libération*, concerning the \$21 billion (current dollar equivalent) extorted by France from Haiti from 1825 to 1944.

This was the “independence debt” that France imposed on Haiti as a condition for diplomatic and trade relations, under threat of military intervention. Haiti won its national independence in 1804 from the slave/colonial empire of France. It was quickly embargoed and otherwise isolated by the empires of the day, including France, Britain and Spain, and by the new, rising power on the scene, the United States.

A story on the open letter appears in UK daily *The Guardian* on August 16.

The open letter follows a successful international media exposé of France’s historic extortion. On July 14, 2010, activists in several countries inspired by the “Yes Men” comedy/political duo and calling themselves the Committee for the Reimbursement of the Indemnity Money Extorted from Haiti (CRIME) issued a fake announcement that France would finally pay its historic debt. France was forced to deny that it was doing any such thing, and threatened legal action against the activists. The action brought media attention, reminding journalists and the public of the historical context behind Haiti’s immiseration.

The exposé, summarized well in a July 16 article in the UK daily *The Independent*, helped to explain the long history of extortion, betrayal and structural injustice that left Haiti so impoverished and vulnerable to devastation by the earthquake that claimed over a quarter of a million lives on January 12, 2010. July 14 is Bastille Day, the date of the 1789 proclamation of France as a republic.

In 2003, the elected government of Haiti headed by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide initiated legal action at the World Court in The Hague to recover the estimated \$21 billion extorted from Haiti. That action was dropped by the human rights violating regime that took power in Haiti following February 29, 2004. President Aristide and the other institutions of elected government were overthrown on that date by Haitian paramilitaries with military and political assistance from the United States, France and Canada. That foreign military intervention was, in turn, endorsed by the UN Security Council.

To read the original French version of the August 16 open letter, go to this website:
<http://www.diplomatiegov.info/openletter.fr.html>.

**REPAY HISTORIC DEBT TO HAITI:
AN OPEN LETTER TO FRENCH PRESIDENT NICOLAS SARKOZY**

The French government has indicated that it is pursuing possible legal action against the Committee for the Reimbursement of the Indemnity Money Extorted from Haiti (CRIME) over a Yes Men-inspired announcement last Bastille Day pledging that France would pay Haiti restitution.

We believe the ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty would be far better served if, instead of pouring public resources into the prosecution of these pranksters, France were to start paying Haiti back for the 90 million gold francs that were extorted following Haitian independence.

This “independence debt,” which is today valued at well over the 17 billion euros pledged in the fake announcement last July 14, illegitimately forced a people who had won their independence in a successful slave revolt, to pay again for their freedom. Imposed under threat of military invasion and the restoration of slavery by French King Charles X, to compensate former colonial slave-owners for lost “property” (including the slaves who had won their freedom and independence when they defeated Napoleon’s armies), this indemnity burdened generations of Haitians with an illegitimate debt, which they were still paying right up until 1947.

France is not the only country that owes a debt to Haiti. After 1947, Haiti incurred debt to commercial banks and international financial institutions under the Duvalier dictatorships, who stole billions from the public treasury. The basic needs and development aspirations of generations of Haitians were sacrificed to pay back these debts. Granting Haiti the status of Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) and canceling part of the current debt only begins to reverse the financial damage done by these recent debts.

More recently, in 2000, Inter-American Development Bank loans of \$150 million for basic infrastructure were illegally blocked by the US government as a means of political pressure. This also did measurable economic and human damage. Each of these institutions and governments should be responsible for the harm they did to Haiti’s society and economy.

In 2003, when the Haitian government demanded repayment of the money France had extorted from Haiti, the French government responded by helping to overthrow that government. Today, the French government responds to the same demand by CRIME by threatening legal action. These are inappropriate responses to a demand that is morally, economically, and legally unassailable. In light of the urgent financial need in the country in the wake of the devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010, we urge you to pay Haiti, the world’s first black republic, the restitution it is due.

Signatories

- Tariq Ali, author
- Gilbert Achcar, author
- Pierre Alferi, author

- Jean-Claude Amara, spokesperson, Droits devant!! (Rights First)
- Kevin B Anderson, University of California at Santa Barbara
- Roger Annis, Haiti Solidarity B.C.
- Anthony Arnove, author and editor, Haymarket Books
- Alain Badiou, Professor, European Graduate School
- Étienne Balibar, emeritus professor of philosophy, Paris-Nanterre
- Nnimmo Bassey, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth–Nigeria
- Rosalyn Baxandall, Prof Emeritus, Distinguished Teaching Prof. SUNY Old Westbury. adjunct CUNY Labor School
- Pierre Beaudet, founder, Alternatives
- Dan Beeton, Center for Economic and Policy Research
- Walden Bello, member of the Philippine House of Representatives
- Medea Benjamin, Code Pink
- Andy Bichlbaum & Mike Bonnano, the “Yes Men”
- Serge Bouchereau, Résistance Haïtienne au Québec (Haitian Resistance in Quebec)
- Myriam Bourgy, CADTM International (Comité pour l’Annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde)
- Houria Bouteldja, Indigènes de la République (the Republic’s Natives)
- José Bové, member of the European parliament, Europe Ecologie
- Leslie Cagan, co-founder, United for Peace and Justice
- Aldrin Calixte, Friends of the Earth–Haïti
- Ellen Cantarow, journalist
- Camille Chalmers, State University of Haiti & PAPDA (Haitian Platform to Advocate Alternative Development)
- CEDETIM (Center for international solidarity research and initiatives)
- Noam Chomsky, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Jeff Cohen, author & media critic
- Jim Cohen, Dept. of Political Science, Paris VIII
- Daniel Cohn-Bendit, member of European Parliament, Europe Ecology, co-president of the Greens-Europe Free Alliance
- Brian Concannon, Institute for Justice & Democracy In Haiti
- Raphaël Confiant, author
- Mike Davis, author & scholar, University of California Riverside
- Warren Davis, Solidarity Co-Chair, Philadelphia Jobs with Justice
- Nick Dearden, Jubilee Debt Campaign UK
- Rokhaya Diallo, activist, Les indivisibles (the Indivisible)
- Christine Delphy, sociology professor
- Rea Dol, director of the Port-au-Prince school SOPUDEP
- Ariel Dorfman, Duke University
- Stephen Duncombe, New York University

- Berthony Dupont, Haïti Liberté
- Ben Ehrenreich, author
- Joe Emersberger, MediaLens
- Yves Engler, author
- Eric Fassin, sociologist, Ecole Normale Supérieure
- Dianne Feeley, editor, Against the Current
- John Feffer, co-director, Foreign Policy In Focus
- Anthony Fenton, journalist and researcher
- Bill Fletcher, Jr., BlackCommentator.com
- Eduardo Galeano, author
- Grazia Ietto-Gillies, UNCTAD & London South Bank University
- Greg Grandin, history professor, New York University
- Arun Gupta, editor, The Independent
- Peter Hallward, philosophy professor, Kingston University
- Hamé, rapper, La Rumeur
- Stuart Hammond, Canada Haiti Action Network
- Thomas Harrison, co-director, Campaign for Peace and Democracy
- Helene Hazera, producer with France Culture radio
- John Hilary, executive director, War on Want
- HK, musician, Hk & les saltimbanks
- Kim Ives, Haïti Liberté
- Olatunde Johnson, director, Friends of the Earth–Sierra Leone
- Eva Joly, member of European parliament, president of the European parliament's Development Commission
- Mario Joseph, BAI (Office of International Lawyers, Port-au-Prince)
- Mathieu Kassovitz, film director
- Robin D. G. Kelley, author and scholar, University of Southern California
- Richard Kim, editor, The Nation
- Amir Khadir, Québec Solidaire, representative in the National Assembly of Québec
- Sadri Khiari, mouvement des Indigènes de la République (MIR)
- Naomi Klein, author & journalist
- Pierre Labossiere, Haiti Action
- Fanfan Latour, Haiti Liberté
- Charles Laurence, journalist and author
- Reed Lindsay, journalist
- Pauline Londeix, ACT UP-Paris
- Isabel Macdonald, journalist and media critic
- Christian Mahieux, national secretary of the Union Syndicaliste Solidaires (the Solidarity Syndicalist Union)
- Henri Maler, scholar

- Noël Mamère, representative in the French national assembly
- Jerome Martin, ACT-UP Paris
- John G. Mason, William Paterson University of NJ
- Gustave Massiah, founding member of AITEC-IPAM (International association of Technicians, Experts and Researchers—Initiatives for Another World)
- Georgina Murray, sociology professor, Griffith University
- Cyril Mychalejko, Upside Down World
- Robert Naiman, analyst, Just Foreign Policy
- Jan Nederveen Pieterse, University of California at Santa Barbara
- Bernard Noël, poet
- Derrick O’Keefe, writer and co-chair Canadian Peace Alliance
- Karen Orenstein, Friends of the Earth-U.S.
- Rosalind Petchesky, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Hunter College & the Graduate Center, City University of New York
- Wadner Pierre, Inter Press Service
- Kevin Pina, Haiti Information Project
- Justin Podur, environmental studies professor, York University
- Serge Quadruppani, author
- Adam Ramsay, No Shock Doctrine for Haiti
- Jacques Rancière, philosophy professor, Paris VIII
- Judy Rebick, author and founder of Rabble.ca
- William I. Robinson, University of California Santa Barbara
- Pierre Rousset, ESSF (Europe Solidarity Without Borders)
- Bobbi Siegelbaum, Health Educator
- Steve Siegelbaum, Founder The Computer School, NYC
- Fanny Simon, Aitec-IPAM (International association of Technicians, Experts and Researchers—Initiatives for Another World)
- Eyal Sivan, film director
- Ashley Smith, writer and Haiti solidarity activist
- Jeb Sprague, University of California Santa Barbara
- Louis-Georges Tin, CRAN (Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires) Jerome Jerome Thorel, Big Brother Awards France
- Louis-Georges Tin, CRAN (Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires)
- Steve Weissman, journalist
- Cornel West, Princeton University
- Howard Winant, sociologist and race theorist, University of California-Santa Barbara
- Cécile Winter, doctor, Collectif Politique Sida en Afrique
- Lawrence Wittner, State University of New York Albany
- Marie Yared, Advocacy Manager, World-Vision France

Socialist Voice #449, August 19, 2010

Afghanistan Crisis Deepens: U.S., Canada and NATO Threaten to Extend War

by **Tim Kennelly**

On March 13, 2008, Canada's Parliament voted to extend the country's military "mission" in Afghanistan to July 2011. The motion by the minority Conservative government was supported by the opposition Liberals. The warmakers correctly estimated that fixing an exit date would deflect mounting opposition to the war among the Canadian public and buy time for Canada's continued participation.

Since then, the political and military situation in Afghanistan has continued to deteriorate for the occupying forces, and leading politicians are now floating proposals to extend Canada's claimed exit date for a military mission that already constitutes a gross violation of the national sovereignty and human rights of the Afghan people.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper says the government will stick to its date. However, he also says that Canada will maintain a military presence in Afghanistan after 2011, to train Afghan police and military personnel. This is a de-facto extension of the military mission and not, as the government claims, in a non-combat role.

Following a visit to Afghanistan in late May, Liberal MP and Foreign Affairs critic Bob Rae said it is time to revisit the exit date and prepare for a longer intervention. Even the New Democratic Party's military affairs critic, Jack Harris, doesn't rule out a continued military role. He was on the same delegation as Rae and told reporters in Kandahar, "Obviously, there are considerable humanitarian and institution-building concerns about Afghanistan. Whether that involves the military or not is another question, indeed."

"There are other ways we can help build institutions."

The Canadian government's vast increases in military spending belie the promise of withdrawal. A 2009 report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives stated that Canada would spend \$21 billion on its military in 2009-2010, a 56% increase since 1998-1999. Recently, it announced a \$9 billion purchase of new fighter jets, one of the largest purchases in Canadian history.

The Escalating War

The war continues to escalate out of control. By mid-August, 425 soldiers of the U.S.-led foreign occupation forces have been killed in 2010. At this rate, it will be the deadliest year for the imperialist coalition in the nine years of the war.

June and July were the first and second most deadly months of the war respectively for the foreign forces. One hundred and two of their soldiers were killed in June, and 89 in July. July was the highest monthly troop loss for the U.S. in Afghanistan, with 66 soldiers killed.

Since taking office in January 2009, U.S. President Obama has significantly escalated the war in Afghanistan. His reckless troop “surge” will result in 100,000 US troops on the ground by the end of August, three times the number when he took office. The only tangible result of this surge has been an increase in deaths of Afghans at the hands of foreign forces and more imperialist troop deaths as resistance fighters wage their own “counter-surge”.

Obama has also expanded the war into Pakistan, where aerial attacks by unmanned drones have killed countless Pakistanis in the mountainous region along the border with Afghanistan.

A War for Democracy and Women’s Rights?

The U.S. and its imperialist allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) say that the goal of their war is to protect democracy and women’s rights in Afghanistan. Both claims are disproven by the realities on the ground.

The U.S. has backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai, a representative of the wealthy and corrupt elite in Afghanistan. His regime consists of landowners, businessmen, and noted war criminals and their cronies. They make up the majority of representatives in the Afghan parliament. Their government has done nothing to improve the conditions of ordinary Afghans, and is despised by a large majority of the population.

The situation facing Afghan women remains as dire as ever. Since 2004, the Afghan parliament has reenacted most of the anti-women policies that existed under the pre-2001 Taliban-led government. Some go beyond anything in place in that earlier time.

Instances of sexual abuse and assault against Afghan women are as high as ever, with the perpetrators of such acts going unpunished. Instances of women committing suicide by self-immolation are at an all-time high.

A July 31 *New York Times* article by Alissa Rubin reports that “girls’ schools are closing; working women are threatened; advocates are attacked; and terrified families are increasingly confining their daughters to home.”

U.S. Military Strategy Fails as Worldwide Opposition Deepens

Since June, Obama’s “surge” has been concentrated around Kandahar City, the main centre of NATO operations in southern Afghanistan since 2004. The need to concentrate the surge in the city itself shows the weakness of the U.S./NATO presence. Equally significant is the increasing ability of resistance forces to launch attacks in the Afghan capital of Kabul.

The Obama administration received a further blow to its strategy in Afghanistan with the July 26 Wikileaks release of the “Afghan War Diary”, a collection of 91,000 secret U.S. military reports on the war, covering the years 2004 to 2009 (some 15,000 of the documents are yet to be released). According to Wikileaks, the diary is “the most significant archive about the reality of war to have ever been released during the course of a war”.

Wikileaks founder Julian Assange told *Democracy Now* in an interview on July 27 that:

“What is most important is the vast sweep of the abuses that have occurred during the past six years, the vast sweep of the everyday squalor and carnage of the war... most civilian casualties occur in incidences where 1, 2, 10 or 20 people are killed, and they really numerically dominate the list of events.”

The documents reveal that much of the war has been conducted covertly by U.S. special operations forces, such as the now famous Task Force 373. These forces operate mostly at night, under the radar of the media, and kill with impunity.

Afghan civilian casualties are far higher than admitted by the occupation forces. According to an August 6 article by independent journalist Justin Podur, the War Diary records 15,219 Afghans killed in combat. There is every reason to believe that many of the reported Afghans killed in combat are in fact civilians. There are 3,994 civilian deaths reported, though only 34 of these are attributed to the occupation forces.

The Diary revelations occur in the aftermath of the removal in late June of the top US commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McCrystal. McCrystal was replaced by General David Petraeus, architect of the Bush Administration's "surge" in Iraq in 2007. McCrystal's firing indicates disarray among leading figures in the Pentagon and the Obama administration, and reflects growing doubts among the general population, if not the military itself, about the "winnability" of the war.

A CBS News poll conducted in early July shows that 62% of Americans are unhappy about the war, an increase of 13 percentage points since May. The same poll shows that 54% of Americans want the US government to draw up a timetable for withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Ignoring the rise in opposition, the U.S. Congress approved the War Funding Bill on July 27. It funds Obama's "surge" to the tune of \$37 billion. But Congressional support is no longer unanimous. One hundred and two Democrats voted against the bill, forcing Obama to rely on Republican votes to pass the measure.

Obama claims that the surge will end in 2011, and that the US will begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan. Yet the U.S. remains committed to enabling the Afghan regime to handle "security" for the country. The U.S. and other governments backing the Karzai regime recently held a conference in Afghanistan and resolved to militarily assist the regime until such time as it can handle military action on its own. They estimate that date to be 2014 at the earliest.

Similar rhetoric is being applied by the U.S. in Iraq. On August 2, Obama announced that the U.S. will end its combat mission there by the end of the month. Yet 50,000 soldiers and 4,500 "special forces" troops will remain on the ground, along with countless air and naval bases. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wants to increase Special Forces personnel to 7,500.

According to writer Jeremy Scahill, the Obama policy in Iraq represents a continuation of the preceding Bush administration policy. He told *Democracy Now* in an interview on August 3 that:

“President Obama is implementing the policy that was on the desk of George W. Bush when he left the White House. This is essentially the Petraeus-Bush Iraq plan. So the idea that Obama is making good on a campaign pledge to end the war is sort of playing with words, because the reality is he just implemented what was current U.S. policy when he came into the White House.”

Afghan Detainee Torture Scandal

The Canadian government has been dogged by deep controversy over the treatment of Afghan detainees by Canadian forces. Allegations that the Canadian military knowingly handed Afghan detainees over to Afghan police authorities and were routinely tortured first surfaced in 2007 when University of Ottawa law professor Amir Attaran produced heavily censored documents obtained through an Access to Information request. They suggested that Afghan detainees handed over to Afghan officials by the Canadian military were tortured.

The allegations gained fresh legs in November 2009 when Richard Colvin, for a time the second highest ranking member of Canada’s diplomatic service in Afghanistan, delivered explosive testimony before a parliamentary committee confirming that Afghan detainees turned over by Canada were tortured and that Canadian officials, possibly even the government itself, turned a blind eye.

Prime Minister Harper then asked the Governor General to prorogue (suspend) Parliament for a few months in order to avoid a deeper probe of the scandal. The request was granted.

When Parliament resumed in March, the Opposition parties passed a motion obliging the government to release the uncensored documents concerning the issue. The government refused. In June, the government struck a deal with the Liberals to appoint a three person panel that will determine how much of the documentation will be released to the public.

The Anti-War Movement

Polling numbers in all the warmaking countries show increased opposition to the war. Attacks on democratic rights and cuts to government social spending that accompany the wars’ pursuits are also prompting growing voices in opposition.

Despite the apparently small numbers of people mobilized in the streets to oppose the Afghan war, there are signs of progress towards broader mobilizations. The Netherlands has been obliged to withdraw its 1,900 troops after the sitting government failed to secure a majority in Parliament to keep them there. It is the first major NATO country to withdraw. The governments of Germany and Britain are under extreme pressure to follow suit.

In the United Kingdom, war resister Joe Glenton, who spent a year in prison for refusing to return to Afghanistan, has emerged as a strong leader against the war.

In the U.S., 850 people attended a July 23-25 United National Antiwar Conference in Albany, New York. The conference called for “unity in action, massive mobilizations, inclusion of the broadest popular sectors of society, democratic functioning, and the construction of a mass social

movement that operates independently of all political parties while seeking to influence their rank and file.” It plans to hold a wide range of activities beginning this fall, culminating in mass demonstrations in New York and San Francisco on April 9, 2011.

The Canadian Peace Alliance – the country’s largest anti-war network – plans to coordinate a campaign throughout the fall against another extension of Canada’s war in Afghanistan, and to host a series of major events in October featuring Afghan social activist Malalai Joya. Recently in Toronto, Josie Forcadilla, the mother of a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan, spoke at a rally of 200 against the war.

As the crisis facing the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan deepens, the withdrawal of the Netherlands shows that the war can be stopped. “Yes we can” build a vocal opposition in the streets, bring the troops home, end the war in Afghanistan, and set the world on an alternative course of social and environmental justice.

For more information on the anti-war movement in Canada, check out the Canadian Peace Alliance.

Socialist Voice #450, August 25, 2010

After A Highly Successful Year, Québec Solidaire Starts Debate On Program

A LeftViews Article by Roger Rashi

In the past year Amir Khadir, Québec Solidaire's first elected MNA (Member of the National Assembly), has become one of Quebec's most popular personalities. He has won plaudits from all observers and, more importantly, from the public for his performance in and out of the Quebec parliament. His widely publicized positions denouncing political corruption among the ruling Liberals, supporting the battles against the government's spring austerity budget or lambasting mining and pharmaceutical corporations, have won him a growing recognition among working people and the wider public.

A recently released poll confirmed Khadir as the second most popular political personality in Quebec with an approval rating of 50%, putting him ahead of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois leader Pauline Marois, and a whopping 26% in front of Liberal Premier Jean Charest.

Commenting on the results, pollster Christian Bourque, said:

“Khadir has become a star of Quebec politics. It is surprising for a party with just one elected official and such a limited speaking time in the National Assembly. But he has the ability to broadcast his message very effectively on both television and radio. He is fast becoming the second official opposition all by himself.”[1]

Not surprisingly, Québec Solidaire (QS) is now credited with a steady 8% to 10% in the polls, more than twice its result in the general elections of 2008.

Doors Open in Labour Movement

It is in this climate of rising sympathy for Québec Solidaire that the Parti Québécois (PQ) pulled a surprising move earlier this spring. At a meeting of the party's leading bodies, Pauline Marois hit out at a mildly left “political club” inside the party called Syndicalistes et Progressistes pour un Québec Libre, known by its acronym SPQ Libre. She removed their label of a “recognized political club inside the party” and abolished their token representation in the PQ's National Council. To add insult to injury, Marois — herself a former member of SPQ Libre — called on the party to “finally modernize its program” by recognizing that “individual Quebecers, not the state, should henceforth be the driving force in Quebec wealth creation.” She thus cast away one of the PQ's most cherished “social-democratic” shibboleths.[2]

SPQ Libre, made-up of some high-profile labour activists (Marc Laviolette, the former President of the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN) labour central, for one) and financed by a few unions, had claimed since 2004 to represent labour and social democracy within the PQ. While not amounting to much inside the party — the SPQ Libre candidate in the 2005 PQ

leadership race garnered a paltry 1.22% — the club did act as the interface with a section of the labour leadership and played an important symbolic role.

The negative fall-out was swift and massive. Jean-Pierre Fortin, Quebec director of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), an early powerful backer of SPQ Libre and Vice President of the Quebec Federation of Labour (Quebec's main labour central with half-a-million members), publicly vented his disappointment. Noting that he was “the only Vice President of the QFL to have openly supported the PQ in the last elections” he sternly added that this shift to the right “will likely cause the PQ to lose some of its most dynamic and mobilizing elements.”[3] Amir and the QS leadership reacted just as swiftly declaring that “the PQ has now definitively shifted to the right” and welcoming all those who wanted to join the ranks of the left-wing party.

As a result many local and middle-level labour leaders angered by the Parti Québécois' open snub have come closer or joined Québec Solidaire. Some have chosen to appear publicly at QS functions.

The earliest example occurred the very same weekend that SPQ Libre was being drummed out of the PQ. At a public meeting held in Longueuil, on Montreal's south shore, Régine Laurent, head of the Quebec-wide nurses union, pointedly remarked that “it is time that Quebec labour drops its long-standing policy of neutrality and opts to support its real friends.” Amir was a guest at the same public event. Another striking example was provided by Francine Levesque, head of Quebec's largest health sector union, the Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux (FSSS), the biggest single affiliate of the CSN with 108,000 members. She appeared at a QS function in Amir's riding and openly thanked him and Québec Solidaire for being “the only MNA and party that are standing shoulder to shoulder with the Public Sector Union Common Front in our negotiations with the government.”

Yet another occurred at the recently held 34th convention of the Montreal Labour Council of the CSN. Amir Khadir received a tumultuous standing ovation after being introduced by the local leader, Gaétan Chateaufort, “as our candidate since 2003.” It dwarfed the lukewarm reception accorded to former leaders of the labour council, Gérald Larose and Pierre Paquette, who are now solidly identified respectively with the PQ or the Bloc Québécois. The CSN's Montreal Labour Council with 90,000 members has officially supported Amir in his last three election campaigns despite the prolonged flirt of the CSN's top leadership with the PQ. (The CSN is Quebec's second biggest central with some 350,000 members.)

As a result of this latest swing to the right, the PQ's social democratic veneer lies in tatters, its neoliberal character more exposed than ever. Labour support is becoming muted and many activists are casting an eye toward Québec Solidaire.

QS: Founded as a “Political United Front”

Where can QS be situated on the political and ideological map? Québec Solidaire is essentially a “political united front” of various left and radical trends opposed to neoliberal and neoconservative policies. So far, it has abstained from rejecting capitalism or calling for

socialism. But its staunch denunciation of the PQ's "neoliberalism with a social face" puts it in direct opposition to many social democrats and their perpetual subservience to the "sovereignist" PQ.

Some analysts have attempted to cast QS as a Quebec variant of western social democracy, but that is definitely not the case. The new party has integrated in its platform the main demands of the social movements and added a strong call for increased public ownership in clean energy production and the health sector. It is also anti-imperialist and anti-war, strongly opposed to Canada's participation in the U.S./NATO war in Afghanistan. It is strongly supportive of the Palestinian people's struggle and sympathetic toward the Latin American left governments.

Furthermore, it is steadily moving in its political practice toward the dual tactic of "the ballot box and the street." After granting an inordinate amount of attention to electoral work in its first two years, courtesy of back-to-back Quebec general elections in 2007 and 2008, QS is now actively supporting and participating in the rising social and labour battles erupting daily in the province. The party is also a highly vocal critic of the federal Tories. Significantly, Khadir was the first political personality in Quebec to denounce the police crackdown on the G20 demonstrators in Toronto this past June. In a highly public move, furiously denounced by some right-wing media pundits, he helped to pay the bail for a well-known Quebec activist held in a Toronto jail after the demos.[4]

In its program and practice the new party is well to the left of any Western social democratic party, not to speak of the meek and mild Canadian New Democratic Party (NDP). As I have argued elsewhere, QS can be more properly understood as a "new left" formation, similar in nature to those that have appeared in several Western countries in the past decade. The best known cases are the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) in France and Die Linke (The Left) in Germany.

The programmatic challenges facing QS also bear a striking similarity to those faced by the NPA and Die Linke. While the "anti" aspect of the platform or program of these formations is well spelled-out, the "pro" aspect is yet to be clearly defined. By their own admission, the socialism espoused by the NPA and Die Linke is kept somewhat vague at this stage of their development.

Public Discussions Ahead of 2011 Congress

As for Québec Solidaire, it has just begun to query the "post-neoliberal" society it advocates. In its May Day 2009 manifesto, the question of the link between capitalism and neoliberalism is explicitly stated for the first time and the question posed openly: "*Pour sortir de la crise: dépasser le capitalisme?*" (To fight the crisis: should we go beyond capitalism?).

This question lies at the root of QS's ongoing attempt to define its program. Following its recently held 5th congress centered on the National Question, the party is now tackling the socio-economic and environmental parts of the program. The preliminary documents put forth by the Policy Commission are opening the door to an energetic discussion of anti-capitalism and ecosocialism:

“As we work on our program, we should spell out the nature and limits of the system, and ask ourselves the following question: isn’t the capitalist system, based as it is on maximizing profit and irresponsible exploitation of nature, the main obstacle to social progress and a healthy relationship to the environment? We need a serious debate on the question so we can determine whether our social problems can be corrected by reforms that respect the logic of the system or if we need to adopt the perspective of going beyond the system.”[5]

Internal debates and public discussions have already started in preparation of the next congress scheduled for February 2011. The process will be a highly public one with submissions sought from members and the public posted on the QS website and many open party educational conferences held throughout the fall. Discussions are kicking off in earnest during the last week of August with leaders and members of QS, as well as trade-unionists and social movement activists, attending and speaking at the “summer university” of Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme, a Quebec socialist review, and/or the “summer camp” of Alternatives, an international solidarity organization. On the agenda are many conferences and workshops on such questions as ecosocialism, activating the fightback against the government austerity budget and building a climate justice movement.

It is a tricky question that the party membership must ponder as both Québec Solidaire’s electoral future and its anti-systemic aspirations are up for discussion. While some members are calling for maintaining the party’s “Rainbow Coalition” character, warning “that socialist sentiments have presently little popular appeal” and hence QS should set its sights “on immediate changes that can be realized within the framework of capitalism”,[6] others argue instead that QS should take advantage of “favourable objective and subjective conditions” to evolve “toward an anti-capitalist party acting within a broad-based movement against neoliberalism.”[7]

All QS members agree that the PQ’s definitive swing to the right “opens a window of opportunity for the constitution of a broad political bloc of all those seeking political change.” The thorny question being, as always, how does a left-wing party move in to fill that void?

Quebec has a history of radical left activism as two recently published scholarly essays on the long suppressed history of 1960s and 1970s activism show.[8] Keeping in mind the defeats and disappointments of the past, today’s new activists are much more keenly aware of the imperative of building a broad-based popular movement in order to obtain any success in the 21st century. •

Roger Rashi is a founding member of Québec Solidaire and presently sits on the party’s Commission on the environment. He is also a member of Masse critique, a recognized anti-capitalist and ecosocialist collective within Québec Solidaire. A version of this article was first published in The Bullet, a publication of the Socialist Project.

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.

Footnotes

[1] “Sondage Léger Marketing. Le Devoir-The Gazette. Le PQ maintient son avance,” *Le Devoir*, June 14th 2010.

[2] “PQ severs ties to SPQ libre,” *The Gazette*, March 15th 2010.

[3] “Le PQ montre la porte au SPQ Libre,” Radio Canada, March 15th 2010.

[4] “Quebec politician posts bail for Jaggi Singh,” CBC July 13th 2010.

[5] Québec Solidaire “Pour une société solidaire et écologique. Cahier de participation au programme. Enjeu 2,” June 2010, p. 5.

[6] François Cyr and Pierre Beaudet, “Québec solidaire doit rester une coalition arc-en-ciel”, *Les Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme*, June 15th 2010.

[7] Roger Rashi: “Québec solidaire: vers un parti anticapitaliste s’inscrivant dans un large mouvement de lutte au néolibéralisme,” *Les Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme*, August 13th 2010.

For a somewhat similar argument: André Frappier and Bernard Rioux, “Le défi de Québec solidaire, devenir un parti de transformation écologique et sociale,” *PTAG*, July 6th 2010.

[8] See Sean Mills’ highly informative account of 1960s radicalism in Quebec: *The Empire Within*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010; and Jean-Philippe Warren’s essay on Quebec’s Marxist-Leninist movement of the 1970s: *Ils voulaient changer le monde. Le militantisme marxiste-léniniste au Québec*, Montreal: VLB éditeur, 2007. Mills judged Montreal to have been in the 1970s “a Maoist centre unmatched elsewhere in North America” (p. 210). Warren opines that two main Marxist-Leninist (Maoist) organizations “dominated the Quebec left for seven to eight years in the 1970s, grouping thousands of members and sympathizers to the point where they became the most important left trend in the post-war era” (p. 16). Both organizations, In Struggle (En Lutte) and the Workers Communist Party (Parti communiste ouvrier), dissolved in the early 1980s.