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Socialist Voice #454, October 5, 2010

## **Venezuela: Left wins, but right makes gains**

**by Federico Fuentes**

Venezuela’s September 26 National Assembly elections gave an interesting insight into the state of class struggle in a country sharply polarised by the revolutionary changes led by the government of President Hugo Chavez.

The significance of the vote is that it occurs after 11 years of the Chavez-led Bolivarian revolution, which has resulted in big improvements in the living standards of the poor majority.

This process has divided Venezuelan society along class lines. This has been reflected in the right-wing opposition’s repeated attempts to overthrow the elected Chavez government by any means necessary — and the poor taking to the streets to defeat these U.S.-backed attempts.

The opposition boycotted the 2005 National Assembly elections, but this time it waged a ferocious campaign, with U.S. funding, that included media lies and economic sabotage. The opposition aimed to break the powerful relationship between Chavez and the people.

Colombia, with U.S. backing, launched a series of provocations against Venezuela in August that brought the two countries close to war. There is also a permanent state of semi-civil war in states near the Colombian border due to infiltration by Colombian paramilitaries.

### **Bittersweet victory**

In light of this, the results can be seen as a bittersweet victory for the revolutionary forces and a defeat for the opposition — but one that gave it a taste of victory.

Out of 165 seats, Chavez’s United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) won 95 and the allied Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) won three. The right-wing, U.S.-funded opposition, grouped in the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), won 65 seats.

The Homeland for All Party (PPT), which recently made a right-wing break with the Chavez government, presented itself as a “third force” and won two seats.

The PSUV won a clear majority, but fell short of its goal of winning two-thirds of all seats. A two-thirds majority is needed to pass “organic” (entirely new) laws. This will make it harder to provide a legal framework to deepen the radical changes underway.

Also, the popular vote was closer than the ultimate distribution of seats. In the nationwide vote for the Latin American parliament, the PSUV won 5,268,939 (46.7%) and the MUD won 5,077,043 (45%). In the vote for the state-wide party lists, from which 52 of the 165 seats are allocated, the PSUV won 5,422,040 votes and the MUD 5,320,175.

### **Regional totals**

If the vote is broken down area by area, it is clear the opposition made some important advances.

There are no doubt that local factors (disgruntlement with sitting members or resentment at candidates who won PSUV pre-selection through corrupt practices) affected votes in different electorates. But these elections were also polarised on a national level. Both sides saw the vote as a step towards the 2012 presidential election.

The opposition increased its votes in the states bordering Colombia. The MUD won the Zulia state list vote by 54.8% to 44.4% (compared with 53.3% to 45.2% in the 2008 elections of governors). In Tachira, it won 56.5% to 42% (compared with 49.4% to 48.1% in the 2008 governor vote).

The PSUV won more deputies than the MUD in the opposition-controlled Carabobo state, and tied in Miranda. However, the opposition actually won the popular vote across both states. In Zulia, however, the opposition won 13 out of 16 seats despite winning only 54% of the vote.

The opposition narrowly won the popular vote in the Capital District of Caracas.

The vote indicates that, amid sharp polarisation, there is little space for forces seeking a middle ground.

As the revolution has grown more radical, some groups have broken with it. Presenting themselves moderate alternatives, groups such as Podemos and now the PPT have ended up crushed between the two main forces that stand for socialist revolution or pro-capitalist counter-revolution.

This is also true for those currents that have tried to present themselves as “left” alternatives to the Bolivarian movement (some representatives of which ran with the PPT in the latest poll).

### **Emboldened opposition**

Despite failing to stop supporters of the revolution winning most seats, the opposition has been emboldened by its strong showing. Declaring that “Chavez is in the minority” and the people “don’t want the government’s radical path”, it hopes to push the lie, begun before the poll, that the opposition really won but had votes robbed through intimidation or an unfair electoral system.

By doing so it aims to energize its base and hold together its fragile alliance of grouplets in preparation for new confrontations. It also seeks to isolate the Chavez government internationally.

The opposition hopes to use its numbers in the assembly to block legislation with the argument that the government has no mandate. It also aims to use the assembly as a platform to attack Chavez and mobilise its base.

This occurs in the context of an offensive by U.S. imperialism that led to the successful coup in Honduras last year, the new U.S. military bases in Colombia, and military activity in the region.

On September 30, just four days after the Venezuelan poll, left-wing Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa survived a coup attempt thanks to mass protests and the actions of loyal soldiers.

### **Role of popular mobilisation**

As Chavez said, the election results were a “solid victory” and “sufficient to continue deepening democratic and Bolivarian socialism.”

However, with the PSUV denied a two-thirds majority, it also means the path of least resistance for radical change is now blocked. Unable to rely on full control of the assembly, the revolutionary forces will have to strengthen popular mobilisation.

The close national vote is another warning sign of the internal problems facing the revolution — problems the opposition, backed by U.S. funds and control of most media outlets, was able to exploit. Bureaucratic abuses and corruption are undermining the revolution from within and eroding its gains.

However, despite these problems, more than 5.4 million people voted in favour of advancing the socialist revolution. They did so despite the threat of war, the impact of the global economic crisis, capitalist-created food shortages, a serious energy crisis and a sustained corporate media offensive. This demonstrates the revolution has a powerful social base with which to push to deepen the process towards socialism.

The local grassroots organising during the election campaign helped strengthen the PSUV, which again acted as a political school for hundreds of thousands of activists. The role of Chavez was key. Once again, he was forced, by the PSUV’s internal problems, to carry most of the weight of the campaign.

The revolutionary process has converted Venezuela into a school of political education. For millions of people, political activity has become part of everyday life, despite the problems and obstacles.

It has given the project of socialism real meaning again as a living movement for change made up of millions of ordinary Venezuelans fighting for a better world.

This movement will now be forced down the path of further confrontations as the popular desire for change comes up against the weight of the old institutions the revolution has inherited.

### **Deepening democracy**

There is no doubt that the “old state that refuses to die,” as Chavez has described it, will clash even more forcefully with the mass revolutionary movement, whose strength is based on growing workers’ and community organisation. A renewed push to strengthen the new bodies of popular power, as part of an offensive against the old state, is badly needed.

This struggle requires bringing the popular forces together into a revolutionary current within the PSUV, in which more right-wing forces still hold a lot of weight. Such a current could take the lead in the public debate started by the election results on what path is needed to build socialism.

For the revolution to advance, there needs to be a push to expand and deepen democracy. This could help transform people from objects simply called upon to vote for representatives that, in many cases, do not represent their interests, into true subjects defining their own destiny.

An important step would be the approval by the current National Assembly — which sits until January — of a long-delayed labour law that creates a legal framework for creating workers’ councils.

What happens in the next period will depend not just on Venezuelan developments, but also the international situation. U.S. imperialism, caught up in a serious economic crisis, is seeking to reassert itself as a global military power.

In this context, Chavez’s proposal, raised last year but put on the backburner by the internal needs of the Venezuelan revolution, for a Fifth Socialist International to bring together socialist parties, currents and social movements from around the globe becomes more important.

*[First published in Green Left Weekly. Based on notes for a talk at a September 28 Socialist Alliance public meeting in Sydney, Australia.]*

Socialist Voice #455, October 6, 2010

## **Mariátegui and the ‘problem of the Indian’ — a critical appreciation by Luis Vitale**

**Introduced and translated by Richard Fidler**

Luis Vitale, a prominent Chilean revolutionary socialist and prolific Marxist historian, died in Santiago on June 27, 2010. Born in Argentina in 1927, he had moved to Chile at an early age and from the mid-1950s was an active militant in the labour movement and far-left parties, both in that country and in exile, until this century.

Vitale’s political engagement began as a member of the Revolutionary Workers Party (POR), a small party affiliated with the Fourth International. During the late 1950s and throughout the ’60s he was a leader of the Chilean trade union central, the CUT, including the period when it was headed by the legendary Clotario Blest. In 1965 Vitale helped to found the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), drafting its statement of principles.

Forced out of the MIR when it called for a boycott of Salvador Allende’s Unidad Popular in the 1969 presidential elections, Vitale joined the new Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR), which gave critical support to the Allende government. Although he was by then working primarily as a university academic, he was active in the workers’ struggles in the militant *cordones industriales* as they fought to extend the revolutionary process. Following the military overthrow of the Allende government, Vitale was arrested, tortured, interned in a concentration camp for nine months, but eventually found his way to exile, first in Europe then in Venezuela, before returning to Chile in the early 1990s. In his later years, Vitale described himself as a “libertarian Marxist”.

During the 1960s, Vitale began writing what became his major work, the eight-volume *Interpretación Marxista de la Historia de Chile*. This was followed by a nine-volume history of Latin America and a host of books on a wide range of topics: social history, the Indigenous peoples; the “social protagonism” of the women’s movement; the environmental crisis; the labour movement; student and other social movements; popular music, etc. — a total of 67 books, 77 pamphlets, 188 learned papers and 209 articles! Many of these works are available on-line (Spanish only).

I have translated below Vitale’s appreciation and critique of the theoretical contributions on the Indigenous question of an early Latin American Marxist, the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui. It offers some insightful thinking on such questions as the relationship between ethnicity and class; Indigenous identity, autonomy and self-determination; and the relationship between Indigenous concepts of land and the environment. The paper reveals the vibrancy and relevance of the thought of both Mariátegui and Vitale in today’s context of increasing radicalization of the Indigenous peoples in anticapitalist struggles and political mobilization, and not only in Latin America. To his last breath Luis Vitale was a strong defender of the Mapuche peoples in Chile, and spoke out in defence of the Indigenous militants who are now on a lengthy hunger strike to protest their jailing on “terror” charges based on legislation from the Pinochet dictatorship.

My translation is made from the Spanish text. I have added a few notes, signed “Translator”, to those supplied by Vitale.

Despite his prodigious literary output, few of Vitale’s writings are translated into English. Three such articles, however, are available on line and I have referenced them at the conclusion of Vitale’s piece on Mariátegui. The first two, published in 1963, are strong defences of the Cuban revolution and its impact on Latin America. The third article, written in 1964, outlined Vitale’s view on the tasks facing the Chilean left in the years immediately leading up to Allende’s electoral victory.

*[Richard Fidler is a Socialist Voice Contributing Editor. This article was first posted on October 5 on his blog, Life on the Left.]*

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## **MARIÁTEGUI’S CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE AND HIS LIMITATIONS CONCERNING THE ORIGINAL PEOPLES**

**by Luis Vitale**

*Presentation at the International Symposium on AMAUTA And Its Period”, [1] Lima, September 3-6, 1997*

*To the memory of Enrique Espinoza (Samuel Glusberg), Principal popularizer of the thought of Mariátegui in Chile during the 1940s and 50s*

The backbone of Mariátegui’s thinking in the final ten years of his life was the National Question or, more accurately, in the words of Tito Flores Galindo, “this dual axis formed by Marxism and the nation meant that Mariátegui’s life was both a page in Peruvian history and a page in the history of socialism. . . . As a matter of fact, based on his particular articulation between Marxism and nation, Mariátegui managed to develop a specific way — Peruvian, Indo-American, Andean — of interpreting Marx and, as always, precisely because it was more Peruvian it became universal.”[2]

Without saying so in so many words, Mariátegui posed a revolutionary epistemological problem for his period, and it is still relevant for anyone seeking to fundamentally transform the present capitalist system, which is more neoconservative than liberal: Latin America from Marx, or Marx from Latin America? We know the standpoint of the Latin American Eurocentric Marxists of that time, alluded to by the amauta: “Neither imitation nor copy”.

For Mariátegui, the national question included not only the national anti-imperialist struggle but the Indigenous problematic, an innovation that broke with the orthodoxy of those who continued to cling to Marx’s initial thinking. While Marx certainly did not manage to systematize a theory, he did contribute some criteria on the national question in the epoch of bourgeois ascendancy at the time when various nation-states of Europe were being formed. In reference to Latin America, Asia and Africa there is not a single word in the Communist Manifesto and other, later writings on the national question, because it was thought that this question would be resolved when the socialist revolution triumphed in the highly industrialized countries. In Europe this applied as

well in the case of the self-determination of the Polish and Irish peoples, but in other cases in Eastern Europe it did not, for they were “peoples without history”, as Hegel said. And Marx was mistaken on the Latin American national question, when he referred to the independence struggles and in particular to Bolívar and the French invasion of Mexico under Maximilian. Lenin signified a qualitative leap with his thesis on the self-determination of peoples, but he made no reference to our America, focused as he was on “the Eastern questions” discussed in the Second Congress of the Communist International (1922).[3]

While not a Marxist, José Martí had a better understanding than any Marxist of the scope of the national question, explaining that it was not limited to imperialist oppression. Together with his Guatemalan compañera, he visited the communities that were heirs to the Mayan splendor, making such original appraisals that he can be considered the precursor on the national question for Latin America. And it still remains to investigate the possible influence on Mariátegui of the thinkers of the nascent and vigorous national and anti-imperialist current headed by the Colombian José María Vargas Vila in his anti-Yankee work *Ante los Bárbaros*, published in 1912, and his repeated calls for Latin American Unity in opposition to the Pan-American Union. Similarly, it would be strange if Mariátegui, who was well informed, was unaware of the writings of Manuel Ugarte, who in 1910 broke with the Argentine SP of Justo with his book *El Porvenir de la América Española* (or Latin America), and in 1911 began an extended tour of our America. In 1927 he addressed a Manifesto to the Youth: “América Latina para los latinoamericanos”, writings compiled later in *La Nación Latinoamericana* (Caracas: Ed. Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1978).

In addition to the investigative works of the Peruvian comrades on the national and continental context I would like to add studies that were condensed in volume V of my *Historia General de América Latina (1890-1930)*, where in addition to the thinkers and Yankee assaults, I analyzed the social and economic structure, especially in the evolution of the workers movement, of the middle strata and the struggles of the peasantry and Indigenous movements of those times in the praxis of Mariátegui. The *amauta* must have derived renewed strength from the revolutionary cycle of 1910 to 1930, expressed in the Indigenous struggles in Ecuador[4] led by Quintín Lame in 1925, which coincided with the anti-oligarchy July [1925] movement in Ecuador; the “Prestes column” in Brazil; and in Colombia the battles of the PSR led by María Cano, the victorious strikes of the oil and railway workers (1926-27) and above all the banana workers strike of 1928, commemorated by García Márquez in *Cien años de Soledad*. Nor could Mariátegui have been unaware of the Venezuelan general strike (1928) against the lengthy dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez, and especially the epic achievement of Sandino.

The heterodoxy of the *amauta* enabled him, in the subject matter we are discussing, to initiate a break with the Eurocentric conception of socialist politics and unilinear history signified by the positivist idea of “progress”. From that perspective, he once said something that is very profound: “Unanimity is always unproductive.” (*Temas de Nuestra América*, Lima, 1900,[5] p. 19. The word “nuestra” he may have taken from Martí, who was the first to use it to differentiate this America from the United States of North America and to reaffirm the Latin American

identity.) If this heterodox Mariátegui were to listen today to his uncritical apologists, he would say (paraphrasing Marx): *I am not a Mariateguista*.

Starting from the historical recognition of the contemporary native peoples and their role, Mariátegui was able to pose in a novel way an alternative society to capitalism, Indo-American Socialism, appropriate to the specific features of Latin America unforeseen by the theoreticians of Marxism: “While socialism has born in Europe, like capitalism, it is not specifically or particularly European.... Indo-America, in this world order, can and must have individuality and style.” Hence his eagerness to find the socialist roots in the “communism” of the ancestral Indigenous communities and his novel conception of the Myth as a social force in history, although he fell into an idealization of the Inca empire which clearly was based on a state with obvious social inequalities and governed by a military and priestly bureaucratic caste. The important thing, for Mariátegui, was that the Inca period constituted for the oppressed people a social myth after the Spanish invasion, raised with the best forces of history by the rebellion of Túpac Amaru, which curiously is not analyzed closely by the amauta.

Mariátegui could also rethink a new type of socialism, based on the specific features of the Latin American revolution because he knew how to analyze his dependent and basically agrarian country in which the Indigenous people and peasants constituted, together with the proletariat, the motor force of the revolution — or, in the present sociological terminology, the “new social subjects”, as Flores Galindo says.[6]

His intellectual legacy led him to incorporate in his philosophy of history concepts from ideologues as disparate as Bergson, Nietzsche and Sorel. Some say that Mariátegui did not read the latter until his travels in Europe. Our doubts were dispelled by Guillermo Rouillón and Alberto Flores Galindo, who have demonstrated the contrary. Mariátegui incorporated from Sorel such contributions as his dimension of the social myth, the criticism of the idea of progress, but more than that the antisystemic force of revolutionary syndicalism, even though this exposed him to accusations of anarchism. The orthodox, especially those of the Stalinist International of the 1930s, tried to characterize or pigeon-hole Mariátegui as a Sorellian, or as having amalgamated the ideas of Marx with those of Sorel, apparently unaware that the latter was, in the years immediately prior to the First World War, one of the first, along with Rosa Luxemburg, to be an unyielding critic of the trade union bureaucracy and the reformism of parliamentarist social democracy — questioning the verticalist conception of the party and fundamentally promoting revolutionary syndicalism as distinct from pure libertarianism or abstract anarchism. In this sense, we are of the opinion that Sorel pursued to their ultimate consequences certain considerations by Marx that the renowned Marxists of his time never dared to pursue “to the very end”. Still to be investigated is whether Sorel, on some key points, was more Marxist than many of the epigones. And it is precisely because he enriched historical materialism with the contributions of Sorel and other iconoclastic thinkers that Mariátegui was the most illustrious and heretical Marxist in Latin America.

However, this process of uninterrupted creativity in Mariátegui, suddenly cut short when he was 36, had some limitations that we will take the liberty of discussing before this select audience of Peruvians, more informed than I of the thinking of the *amauta*.

Interest in Mariátegui's ideas resurfaced with the frustration that arose as a result of the crisis of so-called socialism and of what to the majority of the leftist spectrum was almost sacrosanct. The centennial of Mariátegui's birth coincided with the culminating moment of the crisis, stirring the need to search for a new alternative. Even some left-wing Europeans — usually indifferent to or negative about thinkers outside their continent — were at pains to discuss Mariátegui and issues as remote from their anthropological and ethnocentric reality as the situation of the original peoples [*pueblos originales*] of our America. Having turned their backs to them over a long period, they now turned to apologetics and uncritical applause. Some Argentine communists went so far as to say, in April 1994, that “just as we rejected Gramsci, we also rejected Mariátegui”, without any self-critical acknowledgement that their old leader, Victorio Codovilla, was the architect of this intellectual interment.

### **Mariátegui's limitations on the Indigenous question**

I want to propose to comrades, especially Peruvian comrades, that we discuss some of Mariátegui's limitations on this subject in the hope that this will facilitate us in at least two respects: one, to try to understand in his real dimension one of the most relevant thinkers of the 20th century, not only in Latin America but in the world; two, to contribute to the formulation of a strategic program of the original peoples of today's world.

A discussion of the first point is timely because the resurrection of Mariátegui's thought, after being buried for decades, has promoted a tendency to idealization. And strictly speaking, he, like any thinker, is limited to and conditioned by his epoch and, in the last analysis, his discourse reflects the period in which he lived. One of the factors conditioning Mariátegui's thought was that in his day Marxism was beginning to be codified. Gramsci was one of the few who dared to break through the ideological fence by his defiance of anything that would impose geographical limits on his thinking.

### **Class reductionism and the concept of the vanguard**

Mariátegui was unable — and it was virtually impossible in the theoretical context of the left — to escape class reductionism and the concept of “vanguard”, that is, the introduction from outside, by way of the Party intelligentsia, of revolutionary consciousness or ideas to the proletariat and other oppressed sectors, a conception that Lenin inherited from Kautsky. In this sense, Mariátegui is more orthodox than those who believe and are attached to the resolutions of the first four congresses of the Communist International — political categories that were at the base of his limitations when he addressed the topic of the original peoples.

His class reductionism permeates his writings, above all in his reply to Luis Alberto Sánchez: “The program we put forward is the program of labour. It is the program of the working classes, without distinction as to coast or mountain, Indian or mestizo.” Nevertheless he agreed: “If in the debate — this is theoretical — we have differentiated the problem of the Indian it is because in practice they are also differentiated.”[7] Anticipating the analysts of the ethnic-class relationship, he noted: “The class factor is complicated by the race factor in a form that a revolutionary policy cannot fail to take into account. The Quechua Indian sees his oppressor in the ‘misti’, in the white.”[8]

The ethnic-class relationship was deepened as the Indigenous, in substantial numbers, were forced to proletarianize or become small shopkeepers and landowners. Yet Mariátegui argued that the revolutionary process had to be hegemonized by the proletariat, as did the Marxists of his time, on the assumption that “the problem of the Indian has to have a social solution. Those who produce it must be the Indians themselves.”[9] The greater the number of workers of Quechua origin, the closer the relationship of ethnicity and class: “In Peru the masses — the working class — are four-fifths Indigenous. Our socialism would not be Peruvian, nor would it continue to be socialism, if it did not solidarize firstly with the Indigenous demands.”[10]

### **Self-determination and nationality**

It should be noted that, notwithstanding this originality for his time, Mariátegui was saying that socialism had to solidarize with the Indigenous demands without saying explicitly that the original peoples could autonomously, without delegation to the party, themselves govern their process toward socialism. Therefore, his program lacks a strategic objective for the Indigenous communities, other than the problem of the land, respect for their language and culture, but not basically recognition that they are one (or more) people-nation, a nationality with the right to self-determination; a people-nation, like the Quechua, Aymara or Mapuche who cohabit in various “nation”-states: Peru and Bolivia (Quechuas), Chile, Argentina, Bolivia (Aymaras), Chile and Argentina (Mapuches). Mariátegui was unable to visualize this, but we can no longer continue to overlook his omissions as they concern the original peoples and, above all, in order to rescue some of the remains of this “orthodox” left that continues to try to impose its ideological terrorism on whoever dares to place on an equal footing (albeit not with such force, perhaps) the proletariat and the original peoples, peasants, other wage-earners in the middle classes, the women’s movements, ecologists, poor inhabitants in the urban peripheral zones, students, youth in general, liberation-theology Christians, pensioners, the elderly, homosexuals, lesbians and other social movements.

Mariátegui failed to clarify that the original peoples had to be autonomous in order to adopt their own politics and their own communitarian type of society inherited from the past and prior to the Spanish colonization and obviously prior to the Peruvian state and society. Because, strictly speaking, the original peoples are not Peruvians or Bolivians or Chileans or Mexicans, etc. although Mariátegui did not say this. That is, concretely, the Quechuas are not Peruvians, they pre-exist the Peruvian state. Behind this omission of Mariátegui was not only his conception of the nation-state but also his desire to formulate a national-political project led by the proletariat (represented by the single party), which, as we know, never respected Indigenous autonomy, with the exception of the Sandinistas after their self-criticism in 1982 in regard to the errors committed initially with the Miskitos.

### **The question of identity**

Failing to recognize clearly that the Quechua and other original peoples are a nationality or a people-nation within the Peruvian state, Mariátegui became lost in a search for the Peruvian identity, going so far as to say that the Spanish conquest “frustrated the only Peruvianism that existed.”[11]

Wrong. The Quechua obviously did not express “Peruvianism” prior to the conquest nor do they now, although they are required to possess identity documents. In any case, Mariátegui lamented that the Quechua were kept at the margin: “[T]he elements of the nationality being developed were unable even to blend or unite. The dense Indigenous layer is kept almost totally outside of the process of formation of that Peruvianism that our self-styled nationalists are in the habit of exciting or inflating.”[12]

Mariátegui failed to pose clearly the right of self-determination of the original peoples because he was unable — perhaps owing to the ideological pressure of those who feared a supposed separatism of the original peoples — to appreciate that the Quechua had for centuries constituted a nationality. With this confused ideological “substratum” it was impossible to address clearly the problem of identity.

Above all, it must be observed, without reservation, that the original peoples, in their majority, have an identity that the Peruvians and other non-Indigenous inhabitants of Latin America, whether mestizos or whites, have failed to grasp. Not even the Blacks and Mulattos have the degree of identity of the original peoples.

Mariátegui realized the difficulties involved in achieving national identity and unity: “In Peru, the problem of unity is much deeper because the task here is not to overcome a plurality of local or regional traditions but to contend with a duality of races, languages and sentiments originating in the Spanish invasion and conquest of Indigenous Peru by a foreign race that has not subsequently fused with the Indigenous race, nor eliminated it or absorbed it.”[13] Nevertheless, Mariátegui continued to insist in many of his writings on the need for national unity with the Quechua and to form with them the Peruvian identity: “The Indian is at the foundation of our nationality in formation.”[14]

The formation of our identity as Latin American mestizos or whites is a process in permanent development. There is no sense that we are seeking in the Indigenous past an identity that we never had, although it is possible to encounter certain roots. The identity is made in historical continuity, in membership in a region, in linguistic idioms, in day-to-day life, in culture, in belonging to a social class. It began to be forged with the revolution for Independence and the rejection of European and North American aggression. Identity will be created in the anti-imperialist and anticapitalist struggle, as it is likewise reaffirmed in the movements challenging cultural dependency. In any case, that is no single identity. Let us forge a Latin American identity, and as a nation, that at the same time coexists with the Indigenous, Black and class and gender identity, and the identity of territory, whether of a province, a common region, or a city — identities that are never closed or finished in this process with its advances and retreats.

### **Land and Territory**

Mariátegui makes no differentiation between land and territory, like the Latin American left to this day, and continues to insist that the Indigenous problem is solved with the grant of land or the recovery of part of those lands belonging to them before the Spanish and Portuguese invasion.

For the original peoples, territory is an essential category, and it means much more than the demand for land. In today's terms, territory is the environment, that is, the intimate relationship between human and natural global society. Territory is the habitat of the original people-nation who continue to fight for its reconquest. It is the area in which daily life and communication in a common language are carried on. It is where we work and produce collectively, harmoniously integrating ourselves with nature without damaging it irreversibly.

For mestizo or white peasants land means individual ownership, whereas, for the original peoples it is collective possession (not ownership). Territory is the physical space of the original people-nation and therefore contains identity and culture, which is not only intellectual activity but also songs, dances, specific foods, games, sports and forms of sexuality. In this sense, the cosmovision of the original peoples can help to overcome the dualism between society and nature, the dichotomous criterion of the ideologists of so-called "western civilization", as if human beings were outside of the environment — the ambiente, and not the medio ambiente popularized by the ecologists, because if the environment encompasses the whole of nature and society it cannot be medio.[15]

In any event, we speak only of "geographical environment" or "natural environment". Which led — imagine that! — Marx, in one of his many strokes of genius, to say: "One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of humanity. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist. . . . My relation to my environment is my consciousness." [16] And he added: "Society is therefore the perfected unity in essence of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the realized naturalism of man and the realized humanism of nature." [17] In other words, the know-it-all European marxologists were not paying attention, because ecology could "alter" the axis of the class struggle. We have made this digression because, as we said earlier, we not only want to discuss Mariátegui but to contribute to the original peoples.

### **Nation state**

Mariátegui failed to disentangle the ideological theorizations behind the concept of the nation state. I am not saying that he talked about the nation state as such, but that his arguments were based on no other conception of the state than the one used by the left of his day. Mariátegui wanted to break with Eurocentrism, but he did not manage to break with the Eurocentric conception of the state.

At no time did he make the necessary distinction between "nation"-state and nationalities. Today we have a deeper understanding of this differentiation, for it is obvious that within a given state there can exist various oppressed nationalities, as in the case of the Spanish state with its Basque, Catalan, Galician, and Andalusian nationalities, each with their own identity, language and ancestral customs. Something similar is happening with the Corsicans in the French state, the Serbs, Bosnians and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia and in other countries of Eastern Europe, especially in the former USSR with the Chechens, Ukrainians and other nationalities — problems unresolved by the so-called "actually existing socialism". Not to mention the armed

conflicts of the Tamil ethnic group in Ceylon [sic] or the Kurds in Iran and, above all, the ethnic wars in the heart of Africa.

Not accidentally, the ideologists of the ruling class coined the term nation-state to justify their subjugation of the pre-existing nationalities with the formation of the state, misnamed nation, as they did in the case of the Sicilians and other nationalities in the so-called “unification” of Italy in the mid-19th century. The concept of nation-state arose in modern Europe in accordance with a specific mode of production with a strong industrial and agricultural foundation and an expanding internal market, where the agrarian question was closely linked to the national question. As Pierre Vilar argues, until the early 19th century the state, as a political form, was confused with nationalism as a political ideology.[18]

Otherwise, the nation state — arising out of armed struggle and extolled by most of the left, especially when it is in power — is not a supreme value or an absolute principle, as Hegel thought. Rather, it is a product of history, the appearance and extinguishment of which is commensurate with the existence and end of social classes. So far, no society in transition to socialism has taken steps toward the gradual disappearance of the state, notwithstanding theoretical considerations presented by Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky and Che Guevara, with their thoughts on value theory, the consolidation of socialist consciousness, and women and the new man.

By adhering uncritically to the concept of the nation state, Mariátegui was ideologically blocked from recognizing the Quechua as a people-nation within the Peruvian state. In any case it was virtually impossible in Mariátegui’s time for some theoretician to envisage the multinational, multi-ethnic or pluri-ethnic state or a plurality of nationalities as the Sandinistas or, more recently, the social movements in Colombia, have managed to do. Not even the Zapatistas have raised this concept although they are clear about their identity; they do not use the concept of people-nation although they conduct themselves as such. Is it possibly a new disinformation subterfuge of Subcomandante Marcos aimed at avoiding negative reactions in the Mexican people to the potential separatism of the inhabitants of Chiapas?

While he clearly did not anticipate all the nuances of the national question,[19] Mariátegui was the first Latin American Marxist to incorporate the problematic, although he was more focused on the agrarian question. And he ended with an expression of historic significance: “The Indigenous community still retains sufficient vitality to be converted gradually into the cell of the modern socialist state.... Socialist doctrine can give a modern, constructive meaning to the Indigenous cause.”[20]

In light of the failures of the so-called “socialism”, a socialism without the inverted commas will have to reflect as to whether the future alternative society to liberal neoconservatism should integrate in our Latin American project many of the contributions of Mariátegui and the new social movements. It is not a question of amalgamating Mariátegui’s contributions — which go far beyond the Indigenous question — with those of the social movements, but of integrating them in a theory of revolutionary social change, which leads us to formulate one key thought: If today the revolutionary conception created a century and a half ago (1998 will be the 150th

anniversary of the Communist Manifesto) has proven insufficient, does this not suggest the need for a “refoundation” of the theory of the radical transformation of the present capitalist society to incorporate the contributions of Mariátegui, Che Guevara and the new and old social movements in order to take account of the specificity of Indo-American socialism?

If Mariátegui dared to enrich Marxism with the contributions of Sorel and the Indigenous praxis, we too should dare to incorporate in historical materialism — not as an addition or complement but as an integral part — anti-patriarchal and antisystemic feminism, subversive environmentalism, liberation theology, class-struggle syndicalism, counter-cultural workers and the strategic ideas of the original peoples oriented toward the multi-ethnic or plurinational state.

Mariátegui’s statement in 1925 is more relevant now than ever before: “And from the crisis of this skepticism and this nihilism is born the necessary compassion, strength, decisiveness of a faith and a myth that moves men to live dangerously.”[21] ... “The new generation burns with the desire to go beyond skeptical philosophy. The materials of a new mysticism are being prepared in the contemporary chaos.”[22]

This is our outstanding debt to the *amauta*.

## Notes

[1] *Amauta*, a Quechua word meaning “elder” or “person of great wisdom”, was the name of Mariátegui’s newspaper. It is used here by Vitale to refer respectfully to Mariátegui himself. – Translator

[2] A. Flores G.: *La agonía de Mariátegui*, Int. de Apoyo Agrario, 3rd ed. (Lima, 1989), pp. 22-23.

[3] *Sic*, actually in 1920. – Translator

[4] An apparent slip. Quintín Lame fought in Colombia, not Ecuador. – Translator

[5] *Sic* – An obvious typo. Probably should be 1924. See Vol. 12 of the *Obra completa of Mariátegui*. – Translator

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[7] Alberto Sanchez: *Ideología y Política* (Lima, 1969), p. 233.

[8] *Ibid.*, *El problema de las Razas*, p. 32.

[9] J.C. Mariátegui, *Peruanicemos al Perú* (Lima, 1970), p. 33.

[10] J.C. Mariátegui, “Intermezzo Polémico”, published in the magazine *Mundial*, No. 350, February 25, 1927.

[11] J.C. Mariátegui, “Realismo y futurismo”, in *Peruanicemos al Perú*, op. cit. p. 26.

[12] *Temas de Nuestra América*, op. cit., p. 24.

[13] J.C. Mariátegui, *Siete Ensayos*, p. 261.

[14] “Realismo y Centralismo”, in *Siete Ensayos*, p. 206.

[15] Vitale makes an important point here. Contemporary Spanish uses both the noun *ambiente* and the phrase *medio ambiente* to refer to “the environment”. But the latter term, by attaching *ambiente* to *medio* (which means, depending on context, average, half, resources, etc.) refers to something less than the totality of the environment as it is understood by Indigenous peoples. *Medio ambiente*, literally, can be taken to mean something like “the surrounding environment”, not the whole thing, and thus not necessarily incorporating humanity. – Translator

[16] K. Marx, *The German Ideology*.

[17] K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

[18] P. Vilar, *Iniciación al vocabulario del análisis histórico*, (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1982), p. 171.

[19] To be clear, I use “national question” as it is currently used in political sociology and in the left. But in my opinion it is one of the many concepts of Eurocentric origin that the Marxist classics were unable to escape, adhering as they — and the vast majority of our Latin American theoreticians — did to the nation-state category.

Strictly speaking, it is a serious error to attempt to apply the nation-state concept to Latin America, long populated by millions of Indigenous people, since we have various nationalities among the original peoples. Furthermore, the nation-state in each country was precisely the one that seized their lands and overwhelmed their languages and cultures, except in the case of the Guarani. (See Aníbal Quijano, *Raza, “etnia” y “nación” en Mariátegui: cuestiones abiertas* (Lima: Amauta, 1993), and by the same author, “Colonialidad del poder y democracia en América Latina”, *Revista Debate*, March-May 1994. There is much to ponder in both essays, as in others by Aníbal.

It is urgent, therefore, to undertake a critical analysis of the conceptualization and traditional sociological, historical, political and cultural terminology, as the feminists are doing in respect to the male chauvinist semantic of the social sciences.

[20] J.C. Mariátegui, *Obras*, Vol. 2, p. 312 and *Obras*, Vol. 1, p. 213.

[21] J.C. Mariátegui, “Dos concepciones de la vida”, 9-01-1925, in *Obras Políticas*, selected and annotated by Rubén Jiménez (Mexico City: Era, 1979), p. 398.

[22] *Ibid.* p. 398.

Socialist Voice #456, October 12, 2010

## **Afghanistan: Damning Revelations, a Fraudulent Election, and Possible Extension**

by **Tim Kennelly**

As Afghans voted in elections on September 18 widely considered fraudulent, damning revelations surfaced regarding the conduct of Canadian and U.S. Special Forces there.

A war that has killed 2145 soldiers of the foreign occupations forces, 575 in 2010 alone, is going from bad to worse. There are serious doubts about the specious claims that an “end” to the war is in sight and withdrawal will begin next year.

### **NATO-led killer squads**

For years, Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan has been embarrassed by evidence that Canadian soldiers have routinely turned Afghan detainees over to Afghan authorities for interrogation and torture. Much more ominous charges have now surfaced – that Canada’s elite military unit, Joint Task Force 2 (JTF2), conducts targeted assassinations in secret, with zero accountability, just like its U.S. ally.

Canada’s military police are conducting two criminal investigations and a special “Board of Inquiry” into JTF2 operations. Some of the details were spelled out on CBC Radio’s The Current on September 17 by James Cudmore, the network’s parliamentary and defense correspondent.

According to Cudmore, the first criminal investigation, Sand Trap I, concerns charges that in 2006 a member of JTF2 murdered an Afghan during a commando raid. The investigation began in 2008 and ended in October 2009 with no charges being laid. The military called the murder an “improper killing,” a new turn of phrase designed to soften the brutal reality of the conduct of the occupying armies in Afghanistan.

The second criminal investigation, Sand Trap II, involves other revelations against JTF2, and has been ongoing since October 2009. It is looking into the conduct of JTF2 commandos and officers as far back as 2005.

Sand Trap II is also looking into charges against Special Forces of other nations. From 2005 to 2009, JTF2 was part of a NATO special forces team including U.S. and Afghan forces, among others.

The Board of Inquiry is examining both Sand Trap investigations and is ongoing. It has interviewed over a hundred Special Forces personnel.

A similar investigation by the U.S. military has led to charges against five soldiers who operated as a self-styled “death squad.” Prosecutors claim that that five soldiers mutilated Afghan corpses, collected fingers and other body parts, and posed in photos with the bodies. One of the soldiers, Corporal Jeremy Morlock, has appeared in court, and videotape has emerged of him blaming his

commanding officer for the atrocities. Morlock could face the death penalty if convicted of all the charges laid against him.

On September 15, writer Jeremy Scahill reported in *The Nation* that Blackwater/TRC provided training to the Canadian military through its “Mirror Image” course. The course uses a mock Al-Qaeda cell in its training. The Canadian military paid Blackwater/TRC \$1.6 million.

On October 6, Canadian Forces member Robert Semrau was demoted from Captain to second-lieutenant and booted from the military following a court martial for an October 2008 killing of an unarmed Afghan. His court martial was separate from the Sand Trap investigations.

### **Fraudulent elections**

These damning revelations have come to the fore just as Afghans voted in elections to the Wolesi Jirga, Afghanistan’s lower house of Parliament, on September 18. The elections are widely considered among the most corrupt in the world and will not change anything for ordinary Afghans. The release of results are not likely until late October or November.

According to the September 18 *Globe and Mail*, some 2,500 candidates vied for 249 seats in the Parliament. There are allegations of widespread ballot stuffing and vote buying that could compromise the election elections results in up to one third of the provinces. In addition, many polling stations did not open due to security concerns. On October 6, Afghan police arrested a top election official on fraud charges in connection with the vote.

Noted Afghan women’s rights activist and former member of the Parliament Malalai Joya commented, “We Afghans know that this election will change nothing and it is only part of a show of democracy put on by, and for, the West, to legitimize its future puppet in Afghanistan. ... The people of Afghanistan are fed up with the rampant corruption of Karzai’s ‘narco-state...and the escalating war waged by NATO. (*Green Left Weekly*)

Joya, who was elected to Afghan Parliament in 2005, refused to participate in the election. “This parliament will be made up of lawbreakers, not lawmakers,” she recently said.

### **The spectre of extension**

The Canadian government says that Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011. At the same time, it is talking about keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan to train Afghan police and military. Such a move would amount to a de-facto extension of Canada’s military mission.

The loudest call for Canada to stay in Afghanistan after 2011 has come from the opposition Liberal Party. After returning from a trip to Afghanistan in late May, Liberal MP and foreign affairs critic Bob Rae said that it is time to revisit Canada’s exit date and prepare for a longer intervention.

Mark Sedwill, NATO’s ambassador to Afghanistan, is also pushing Canada to commit to an extension of its military mission in Afghanistan. He told the *Vancouver Sun* on September 22, “I

will speak to Canada about the overall progress of the campaign and where we think the shortfalls are and where we need additional resources and rebalancing ... Any decision that Canada makes now or in the future to continue to provide input on the military or civilian side would be tremendously welcome and not only because of the political importance of Canada.”

It is possible that the Liberals and Conservatives will team up in Parliament this fall or winter to approve an extension of the military mission in Afghanistan, though they will likely call it a shift to a “training” role of the Afghan National Police.

The opposition New Democratic Party is open to a “policing” role post-2011, similar to the one maintained by the UN Security Council in Haiti and which it supports.

Party defense critic Jack Harris told the *National Post* in mid-September, saying “If they don’t have a deal and the government is prepared to let that military commitment expire, then we’d be very happy to debate what future endeavors Canada can offer to the Afghan people through other programs.”

The U.S., too, is fudging its timeline for withdrawal from Afghanistan. President Obama has said that the U.S. will begin drawing down its troops in July 2011. However, one of the top aides to General David Petraeus, top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, told the *Christian Science Monitor* that “What General Petraeus stated – and I agree with him – is that July, 2011 is not the start of withdrawal; it’s the start of talking about transition...”

The aide added, “I don’t see US troops drawing down anywhere in Afghanistan until General Petraeus gives us the order.”

In Ottawa, Canada’s armaments manufacturing industry is stepping up lobbying efforts in favor of a multi-billion dollar purchase by the federal government of Lockheed Martin F35 fighter jets. The planes’ primary purpose is waging combat operations abroad, notwithstanding forceful claims by the government they are needed for territorial defense of Canada. It is the single largest military purchase in Canadian history, and is proceeding without any formal debate or vote in Parliament.

The industry is worried that a change in government in a forthcoming election could lead to the cancellation of the purchase. In 1993, a newly elected Liberal government postponed the purchase of military helicopters agreed to by the preceding Conservative government.

### **The anti-war movement**

The Canadian and U.S. anti-war movements continue to mobilize against the war in Afghanistan. The Canadian Peace Alliance is sponsoring a four-city speaking tour by Afghan social activist Malalai Joya. It began in Ottawa on Wednesday, October 6, and includes talks in Calgary, Vancouver, and Toronto.

Outspoken British anti-war activist and former Member of Parliament George Galloway will make a ten-city speaking tour of Canada in November. He spoke in Toronto on October 3

following a victory in the Canadian federal courts against a ban from entering the country levied by Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney 18 months earlier.

The anti-war movement in the U.S. is planning major demonstrations in New York and San Francisco on April 9, 2011.

Socialist Voice #457, October 12, 2010

## **Rallies in Vancouver Protest Continued Detention of Tamil Asylum Seekers**

by **Roger Annis**

Weekly rallies are taking place in Vancouver in support of the 492 Tamil asylum seekers who landed on Canada's west coast on August 13. The government of Canada seeks to block their entry into the country and right-wing forces are mobilizing for changes in policy that would sharply curtail the rights of refugees in future such arrivals. A long political battle has begun.

### **No freedom for asylum seekers**

The rallies are taking place outside the Burnaby Youth Detention Center in Greater Vancouver where many of the 63 women and 49 children who landed August 13 are being detained. Rally participants use noisemakers and broadcast loud music to send a message to the asylum seekers inside that they have strong support in Canada for their claim for refugee status.

Two months after surviving a difficult, three-month voyage across the Pacific Ocean, nearly all the people who were on board the *MV Sun Sea* remain locked up, with families forcibly separated. Canada's immigration service is providing as little information as possible about their applications for political asylum. Even Canadian-resident relatives of the detained are being denied information.

The Immigration and Refugee Board is holding hearings for the detained as prescribed by Canada's refugee laws and conventions. But government lawyers are arguing the Tamils should remain locked up. Decisions by IRB officials to release people are being blocked by government appeals. Only a handful have won release.

The federal government has painted the asylum seekers as "queue jumpers" with possible "terrorist links" or as hapless victims of "human trafficking." On the day the *Sun Sea* arrived, Public Safety Minister Vic Toews said that his government "must ensure that our refugee system is not hijacked by criminals or terrorists."

He warned that the *Sun Sea* is a "test boat," to be followed by others, "part of an organized criminal enterprise."

The arrival of a refugee ship such as the *Sun Sea* is rare in Canada. But the federal government is working hard to stop any more Tamils from making asylum applications by this route. One plan is to turn back ships on the high seas. Sri Lanka's ambassador to Canada said this option was explored in consultations between her government and Canada's as the *Sun Sea* approached Canadian waters.

The government is also seeking to lay criminal charges against the owner of the ship under "human trafficking" laws.

### **Ottawa eyes Australia's interment camps**

Still another route being explored is emulation of Australia's harsh, mandatory detention policy. Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney has traveled to Australia for intense consultations with officials there. "A close study of the Aussie experience would certainly be useful to us in framing our own response," he told the Canadian Press in mid-September.

Australia has a policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers. It has built internment camps on Christmas Island, a colony located 2,600 kilometers northwest of Perth that it acquired in 1957, and on its mainland. There are currently 4,600 asylum seekers in detention, many of them for indefinite periods. Of those, 2,400 are held on Christmas Island.

The camps are built and operated by private contractors. At least 27 people have died in them since 2000.

So far in 2010, Australia has intercepted 96 vessels on the high seas, detaining those asylum seekers that do not agree to turn around. It is pressuring East Timor to accept the placement of Australian detention centers on its territory.

Pamela Curr of the Asylum Seeker Resource Center in Australia told the country's public broadcaster on September 20, "We know that people who have been tortured and suffered extreme trauma, such as watching family members killed or mothers and sisters raped, suffer most of all in detention."

### **What to do in Canada?**

Sadly for proponents in Canada of the Australian solution, Canada has no offshore colony it could use for detention. Its internal colonies – occupied Indigenous people's territories – could never be used for this purpose. So the government's short-term option is to work with cooperative governments in Asia to block Tamil or other asylum seekers at their point of departure.

In the longer term, allies outside of government are offering other ideas and organizing to implement them. To wit, the Canadian Centre for Immigration Policy Reform (CCIPR) was launched on September 27 to bring about a fundamental change in immigration and refugee policy. It is headed by former Canadian ambassador Martin Collacott, a senior fellow with the rightist Fraser Institute think tank, and former Conservative Party candidate for Parliament Margret Kopala.

Other founding members include James Bissett, former director general of the Canadian Immigration Service; Barbara Kay, *National Post* columnist; and Peter White, a long-time associate of media baron Conrad Black and former publisher of *Saturday Night* magazine.

The new group's advisory council includes Order of Canada recipient Derek Burney, often described as a "pillar of the establishment" in Canada. He is former CEO of Bell Canada International and was head of current Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2006 transition team following the Conservatives' unseating of the Liberals in that year's election.

The group's website includes links to seven "organizations with useful analyses of immigration and refugee issues." Two are influential right wing think tanks in Canada, the Fraser and CD Howe institutes. The other five are prominent international anti-immigration groups, including the US-based Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform, which has been identified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Like anti-immigrant groups in other countries, the CCIPR has latched onto environmental arguments in attempt to give its arguments credibility among progressives.

Interviewed on CBC Radio's *Cross Country Checkup* in August, James Bissett offered his ideas for immigration and refugee policy "reform." He wants an automatic detention of asylum seekers for a minimum of seven days; elimination of certain appeal procedures for applicants; no social service benefits to asylum or refugee applicants while awaiting an immigration department decision; requirement that claims of persecution can only involve those alleged at the hands of a government; and the lifting of protection of Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, namely the right to life, liberty and security of the person.

Bissett also wants to expand the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Party Agreement to other countries. This agreement automatically disqualifies an asylum seeker trying to enter Canada from the U.S. because he/she is deemed to already be in a safe territory.

### **Refugee and asylum seekers: an ongoing saga**

The effort to whip up public sentiment against the Tamils follows the adoption of a new federal refugee law on June 29. Bill C-11 was rushed through parliament with all-party support. It speeds up the refugee application process as demanded by rights advocates, but also introduces new restrictions on asylum seekers.

The government did not fare so well in the political battle it unleashed in August to turn public opinion against Tamil asylum seekers. For one, defenders of the Tamils made effective arguments detailing the ongoing political repression faced by Tamils in Sri Lanka one year after the government's war against Tamil self-determination ended in a defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the largest military force among the Tamil population.

For example, a letter by several of the Tamils detailing their personal odyssey in reaching Canada was released on August 16 and widely reported in print and broadcast media. It detailed the harrowing conditions they fled in Sri Lanka.

Seven thousand civilians were killed last year in the closing months of the war that saw the militarist government of that country finally crush the armed defense units of the Tamil population. Hundreds of thousands of Tamils were placed in detention camps while arbitrary arrests, disappearances and murders at the hands of government forces continue to this day.

Many human rights agencies have detailed these conditions, including Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). The Sri Lankan government has

refused all calls for an independent investigation into the conduct of its armed forces during the war.

The Canadian government is also hindered by its own history of racist treatment of immigrants, including turning away the victims of the Holocaust during the 1930s. This has made many Canadians extremely wary of government moves to restrict immigrants' and refugees' rights.

Contrary to the government's absurd claims, there is no such thing as an "application process" for many refugees fleeing persecution. Refugees fleeing for their safety, or that of their families, have the right under national and international laws to seek refuge by whatever humanitarian means are at their disposal.

The Tamil community in Canada is working hard to win the release of the detainees. Children in detention now attend makeshift classes organized by the Burnaby School Board. But the government and immigration service continue to prolong the detentions as long as possible.

Canada processes about 25,000 applications for political asylum per year. It processes an extra 10,000 applications a year made abroad.

The UNHCR says there are 146,098 Tamil refugees in the world as of January 2010. About half reside in India, the rest are dispersed in 57 other countries. There are 500,000 people of Tamil origin living in Canada.

The last ship carrying Tamil refugees to Canada was the *Ocean Lady*, which arrived in Canada on October 17, 2009, with 76 people on board. They faced a lengthy asylum application process in which the government tried to prove links to "terrorism" in Sri Lanka. But after several months of tense hearings, all 76 were released from detention.

As *Vancouver Sun* columnist Stephen Hume reported on August 26, Canada has accepted 92% of Tamil refugee claims, an implicit recognition that Sri Lanka is one of the most dangerous places on Earth.

The Canadian Council on Refugees says the burden of caring for refugees falls hardest on poor countries. In 2006, for example, Tanzania took in more refugees than Canada, France, Australia, the U.S., Germany, Spain and Japan combined.

Canada has long backed the government of Sri Lanka, despite its record of human rights violations. In 2006, it banned the LTTE as a terrorist organization. Anyone belonging to it or supporting it is subject to draconian consequences. The government is creating a belief that all Tamil asylum seekers are members or supporters of the LTTE unless they can prove otherwise.

*For more background on the 492 asylum seekers who arrived in Canada on board the MV Sun Sea, read, "Experts say security reasons may keep Tamils in detention," Vancouver Sun, September 6, 2010.*

Socialist Voice #458, October 22, 2010

## **The Cuban Revolution: Challenges and Changes**

**A LeftViews article by Dave Holmes**

*LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion. This article was presented as a talk to the Geelong branch of Socialist Alliance on October 6, 2010. The slideshow that accompanied the talk can be viewed at <http://links.org.au/node/1939>.*

For more than 50 years tiny Cuba (its population is currently about 11.25 million) has punched well above its weight in world politics. That's because it carried out an authentic socialist revolution and has ceaselessly fought to defend and extend it in the teeth of remorseless pressure from its giant neighbour.

The Cuban Revolution has been marked by its tremendous internationalism, the high points of which have been its armed intervention in Angola in support of the struggle against the South African apartheid regime and its unstinting medical aid to the Third World.

The Cuban Revolution has shown that a Stalinist bureaucratic degeneration is not inevitable. There are bureaucrats in Cuba but the *Fidelista* leadership has largely managed to contain this danger by its constant vigilance, mass campaigns and appeals to the people.

### **Revolution faces biggest challenge**

Today the Cuban Revolution arguably faces its biggest challenge. It is confronting severe economic problems. There appears to be a growing bureaucratic danger, an alarming growth of corruption, widespread popular recourse to the black economy in order to survive and a growing social differentiation among the population.

What makes all this even more challenging is that the historic generation which led the original revolutionary process is slowly passing from the scene. The imperialists (and more than a few people on the left) are convinced that the passing of Fidel and Raul will signal the collapse of the revolution.

In this talk I want to present this crisis in its context, to explain where it comes from, the current situation in broad outline and what changes the Cuban government is proposing.

### **ENORMOUS EXTERNAL PRESSURES**

Whatever weaknesses that exist and mistakes that may have been made, the key background to Cuba's current economic woes is the absolutely enormous external pressures bearing down on them – pressures of this magnitude would have destroyed any other country.

## **U.S. blockade**

Foremost among these is the U.S. blockade. Begun in 1960 after Cuba nationalized U.S. enterprises, it is all-encompassing. As Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla recently described it, the blockade is an “economic, commercial and financial siege that has lasted half a century.”

A report prepared to be presented to the next session of the UN General Assembly puts the direct economic cost of the blockade to Cuba at US\$750 billion.[1] To put this figure in perspective, it is approximately seven times Cuba’s current GDP of \$110 billion.[2] That is, the blockade has cost Cuba seven years of development!

We might well wonder where would Cuba be today if there had been no blockade.

The innumerable bourgeois commentaries on Cuba’s economic problems rarely dwell, if at all, on the impact of the blockade. The imperialists and their flunkies go on about how socialism doesn’t work but make absolutely no acknowledgement of their own –far from insignificant – contribution to Cuba’s problems!

## **Collapse of USSR**

Almost from the start, the Soviet Union’s support for Cuba was hugely important to its survival. For instance, the USSR bought Cuba’s sugar and citrus crop at preferential (i.e., fair trade) prices and supplied oil and other aid in return.

Of course, Cuba was negatively influenced by various Soviet ideas and practices but if it had not had Moscow’s backing it might not have survived.

The 1991 collapse of the USSR meant Cuba immediately lost 80% of its exports and imports. This ushered in a desperate struggle for survival –literally. GDP fell by a third. People almost starved. These years are called in Cuba “the special period in time of peace.” The worst time was the early to mid-nineties.

Today, living standards on the island are still below the 1989 level.

## **‘Natural’ disasters**

If all this were not enough, in 2008 Cuba was severely affected by climate change. Three hurricanes –Gustav, Ike and then Paloma –pounded the island, causing around \$10 billion of damage.

Ike was the most destructive hurricane in Cuba’s history. The nickel plants were damaged, crops were hit. The already bad housing situation was seriously worsened; hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed and a great many dwellings remain in dire need of repair.

And on top of the devastating hurricanes, Cuba is in the grip of drought. Although Cuba is normally lush and wet, in the face of climate change that doesn’t mean what it used to. The country’s water storages are currently only about 40% full and the population is being urged to save water. In 2004 a severe drought hit agriculture hard in the east of the island.

### **Collapse of nickel price**

Cuba is a major world supplier of nickel and cobalt. It has a third of the world's proven reserves of nickel, which is essential in the production of stainless steel and other corrosion-resistant alloys. Cuba also produces about 10% of the world's cobalt, a critical metal in the production of high-performance alloys.

In April 2007 the price of nickel reached \$52,000 per tonne, but at the end of 2008 it had crashed to about \$9,000. It has since climbed back to around \$20,000. In 2007 nickel brought in \$2.8 billion and was Cuba's leading export earner but this figure fell to \$1.5 billion in the following year.

Cuba's nickel is sold mainly to Canada, China and the Netherlands. (The Canadian multinational Sherritt operates a big nickel plant as a joint-venture with the Cuban government.)[3]

### **Development of tourism**

Tourism has developed massively in the last two decades and in 2009 some 2.4 million holidaymakers visited the island. Tourism earns the country about \$2 billion per year although receipts dropped 12% in 2009 due to the global financial crisis (the number of visits held up but stays were shorter and less money was spent).

Most of the hotels and resorts are joint ventures between Spanish and Canadian operators with the Cuban government.

However, important as tourism is to the national economy, it also brings with it some very serious problems. Especially worrying is the social differentiation which results as some Cubans have access to higher earnings and foreign currency (tips, payments in kind, selling services and goods to tourists). Prostitution has also staged a certain comeback, although it cannot be compared to either the past or to other Latin American countries.

Tips of tourism workers are meant to be handed over to the state but this is probably unenforceable.

The importance of nickel and tourism as export earners takes place against a backdrop of the decline of the once mighty sugar industry. Production was 8 million tons before the collapse of the USSR, the projection for 2010 is only 1.2 million tons. The government is trying to attract foreign investment.

### **Venezuela**

The development of the revolutionary process in Venezuela has been a life-saving boost for Cuba. Apart from the enormous lift in morale –the feeling that they are no longer alone –there have been very material benefits.

Venezuela is now Cuba's main source of imports (31% in 2008). The special relationship with Venezuela has also meant credits for projects at low interest rates and various joint ventures.

Cuba has sent tens of thousands of health workers to Venezuela (in 2006 the figure reached 33,000) and these have been vital in enabling the key medical “mission” Barrio Adentro to get off the ground.

Cuba is also helping to train Venezuelan doctors and thousands of Venezuelans have received surgical treatment in Cuba (50,000 got free eye surgery in 2005). In return Cuba gets vital oil cheaply from Venezuela.

A fibre-optic cable is being laid from Venezuela to Cuba via some other island countries. When this is finished Cuba will at last have access to cheap high-speed internet connections. (At the moment Cuba pays a Canadian company through the nose for a slow connection.)

### **China-Cuba relations growing**

Developing economic relations with China has also been very important. China has supplied Cuba with buses and trains and household goods, it has provided long-term credits and takes a significant amount of Cuba’s nickel output. China is also playing a role in helping Cuba prospect for oil offshore.

Having a trade relationship with China is very important in offsetting the U.S. blockade. China is simply too big to be pushed around by Washington.

## **ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**

### **Current economic situation**

Here are some basic facts about Cuba’s economic situation:

1. Between 2001 and 2003, the Cuban economy grew at an average annual rate of 2.9%; between 2004 to 2007, the figure was 9.3%. In 2008 GDP growth dropped to 4.1% and in 2009 to 1.4%.
2. Cuba’s earnings from the export of goods have been hard hit by the fall in commodity prices – primarily nickel (40% of total exports in 2009) but also sugar (13%).
3. At the same time the cost of key imports (fuel and food) has risen significantly. As a result, Cuba’s balance of payments for the export and import of goods is heavily in deficit –in 2009 it was \$6.5 billion.
4. This deficit is only balanced by the massive export of services. This is made up of tourism receipts (\$2.2 billion gross in 2007) and payment (mainly from Venezuela) for the provision of medical personnel (estimated at over \$5 billion in 2007). One inescapable problem of this heavy reliance on the export of services is that it is largely dependent on factors outside Cuba’s control, i.e., Chavez and the Venezuelan revolutionary process and the vagaries of the tourism market.
5. Another very important source of hard currency is remittances from Cubans living abroad, mainly in the U.S. These are estimated at \$600 million to \$1 billion annually. The downside, however, is that the remittances create a division between those Cubans who have access to them and those who don’t.

6. Food comprises a large part of Cuba's imports (17% in 2009). 70% of its food is imported. In 2008 it spent \$2.2 billion on importing food –567,000 tons of rice and 246,000 tons of dried beans cost it \$700 million. Replacing expensive imports with locally produced food is a major objective of the Cuban government. A big part of this is to encourage more people to take up farming and make the conditions of agriculture much more attractive.

7. At the beginning of 2009 a crisis in servicing its foreign debt (\$19.5 billion) led the government to freeze around \$1 billion in the bank accounts of foreign firms. A lot of these funds are still frozen.

### **Two-tier currency**

Cuba has a two-tier currency system, designed to impose a hefty tax on all foreign currency brought into the country, whether by tourists, remittances or business.

There are ordinary pesos and convertible pesos (CUCs). All foreign currency has to be converted in CUCs. U.S. dollars attract fees and taxes of about 20%; other currencies only 10%.

There is a network of special shops (“dollar shops”) selling all sorts of goods at much higher prices. These stores take only convertible pesos.

This system is very unpopular with those ordinary Cubans who have no access to CUCs. The government has pledged to eliminate the CUC and has made a small start this year.

### **Daily struggle**

Eighty-eight per cent of Cuban workers are employed by state. Only 12% work in the private sector (private farmers, artists) –this includes 142,000 self-employed (less than 3% of total workforce).

The average wage in Cuba is about \$20 per month. However, there are no taxes on this income, healthcare and education are free, people own their homes or pay a only a very small rent to the state.

In addition there is the *libreta*, the ration system. In place since 1962, the *libreta* allows everyone to purchase from list of basic commodities at subsidized prices.

But today the ration only covers about half the month. Furthermore, over the last few years it has been reduced. For instance, last November potatoes and peas were removed from the *libreta*. Previously Cubans could buy 4 pounds of potatoes per month at about 1 cent per pound. Now they can buy as much as they like but at 5 cents per pound.

The government simply cannot afford to keep the *libreta* going as before and there is even talk of phasing it out completely.

The net result of inadequate wages and pensions and the inadequate *libreta* is that most people are forced to supplement their income with various kinds of activities.

Social inequality is growing as some people are better placed, that is, their jobs enable them –one way or another –to more easily get precious CUCs.

### **Black economy**

The black (non-official) economy encompasses a whole range of activities, from the largely harmless to the seriously criminal and everything in between. There is a very informative study on this by Canadian academic Arch Ritter (although he is very anti-Fidel).[4]

Some examples include: Selling homemade crafts to tourists, selling homemade food on the street; paying extra or bribes to get scarce goods or services; stealing goods from the state and selling them; using a state car as a private taxi; selling jobs in the lucrative tourist sector with prized access to dollars (tips and services).

A 2007 study by the Communist Youth (UJC) found that more than 282,000 young people in Cuba neither worked nor studied; a lot of these are concentrated in Havana. Obviously they get by one way or another. But such facts cause great popular resentment and undermine social morale.[5]

Mere prohibitions and increased vigilance by police and law enforcement bodies won't solve the problem of the black economy when weighty economic realities are driving people towards it *en masse* simply to survive.

### **REFORM PLAN**

#### **Raul Castro argues for reform**

On April 4, 2010 Raul Castro addressed the congress of the Communist Youth League (UJC). He set out the main considerations behind the reforms which have been announced throughout the year:

“Today, more than ever before, the economic battle is the main task and focus of the ideological work of the cadres, because the sustainability and the preservation of our social system rest upon this work.

“Without a sound and dynamic economy and without the removal of superfluous expenses and waste, it will neither be possible to improve the living standard of the population nor to preserve and improve the high levels of education and health care ensured to every citizen free of charge.

“Without an efficient and robust agriculture that we can develop with the resources available to us –without even dreaming of the large allocations of times past –we can't hope to sustain and increase the amount of food provided to the population, that still depend so much on the import of products that might be cultivated in Cuba.

“If people do not feel the need to work for a living because they are covered by excessively paternalistic and irrational state regulations, we will never be able to stimulate a love for work nor will we resolve the chronic lack of construction, farming

and industrial workers; teachers, police and other indispensable trades that have steadily been disappearing.

“If we do not build a firm and systematic social rejection of illegal activities and different manifestations of corruption, more than a few will continue to enrich themselves at the expense of the labour of the majority, while spreading attitudes that directly attack the essence of socialism.

“If we maintain inflated payrolls in nearly every sector of national life and pay salaries that fail to correspond to results achieved, thus raising the amount of money in circulation, we cannot expect prices to cease climbing constantly or prevent the deterioration of people’s purchasing power. We know that the budgeted and business sectors have hundreds of thousands of excess workers; some analysts estimate that the surplus of people in work positions exceeds one million . . .

“In summary, to continue spending beyond our income is tantamount to consuming our future and jeopardizing the very survival of the revolution.”[6]

### **Reform plan**

There are a number of key points to the reform plan:

1. One million workers are to be cut from the state payroll over five years; half a million by next March.
2. Many smaller state enterprises in light industry and agriculture are to be converted to worker cooperatives, so hopefully a lot of workers will remain in their current workplaces but under different ownership and remuneration arrangements.
3. 178 occupations are now open to private enterprise; in 83 of these owners can hire workers other than relatives.
4. Previously announced agricultural reforms aim to make farming easier and more attractive: land is freely available in usufruct to those who want to farm; purchases of equipment and supplies is to be localized and made easier; produce prices raised; restrictions on selling are to be significantly eased.
5. An essential corollary of this is that the tax system is to be revamped so that the government can profit from all the increased private activity –without, of course, killing it off.

### **Reforms: aims and risks**

The economic reforms have a number of interrelated objectives:

1. To trim the state payroll and increase the productivity of the state sector.
2. To increase economic efficiency by stimulating people’s self-interest.
3. To draw people out of the black economy into open legal economic activity which can be regulated and taxed.

4. To increase make Cuban agriculture a lot more productive, increase food production and reduce or eliminate the huge food import bill.

5. To make daily life less stressful by making things easier: having services that work, food readily available.

6. Obviously, along with the reforms, the state will need to significantly raise wages and pensions.

There are very real risks. We know that the market always creates inequality and a stronger petty-bourgeois layer. There will need to be a strong regulatory and tax regime. Of course, bourgeois critics –and Cuba has whole armies of them –never worry about such things: the right to exploit and profit is presumably an inalienable human right.

However, despite the risks, Cuba has no real choice. It is trying to establish a clear framework so that it can improve the country's economic performance and maintain all the gains of the revolution.

## **BUREAUCRACY AND CORRUPTION**

Over the past year or so there have been a number of very disturbing incidents which show there are some real problems in the party and state apparatus. But they also show that no one, even the most high-ranking officials, is unaccountable or above having to answer for their actions.

### **Top leaders dismissed**

In March 2009 a number of central leaders were dismissed from their state and party posts for serious errors. Most prominent among them were Carlos Lage Davila, Politburo member and effectively Cuba's prime minister since 1986, and Felipe Perez Roque, Central Committee member and foreign minister.

According to a June 29, 2009, Inter Press Service article:

“Raúl Castro's moves were aimed at eliminating “test tube” leaders –a term that refers to young people who leapt from youth organizations to powerful positions –and at putting an end to parallel structures of power in order to strengthen the country's institutions ... Disloyalty, erratic behaviour, dishonesty and abuse of power are the main charges against those involved “ [7]

Lage and Perez did favours for Lage's lifelong friend Conrado Hernández and talked with him far more freely than they should have. Hernández was a representative for Basque businesses in Cuba. He was also an informant for Spanish intelligence (CNI). Through him the CNI made recordings of Lage and Perez slagging off Fidel, Raul and other top leaders.

Lage had ambitions to the post of first vice-president of the Councils of State and Ministers, which was instead given to José Ramón Machado Ventura in February 2008.

In one of his periodic “reflections” touching on the affair, Fidel said that “the sweet nectar of power for which they hadn’t experienced any type of sacrifice awoke ambitions in them that led them to play out a disgraceful role. The enemy outside built up their hopes with them.”[8]

Reportedly, Lage now works as a pediatrician, Perez as an electrical engineer.

In fact, a large part of the Cuban cabinet was replaced in the first part of last year, either for being too close to foreign business or being ineffective in dealing with corruption.

### **Rogelio Acevedo**

In April 2010 the head of the Civil Aeronautics Institute of Cuba, General Rogelio Acevedo, was dismissed. As a teenager he had fought in the Sierra Maestra and was a veteran of the war in Angola.

He and/or people in his department sold space on Cuban airliners to foreign companies and kept the proceeds for themselves. Apparently, they even planned to buy a plane themselves for several million dollars to cater for their growing business. The ripples of the investigation have spread wider and wider.[9]

### **Inspection department set up**

In August 2009 a Comptroller General’s Department was established. Its charter is to monitor government departments and crack down on corruption. The current Comptroller General is Gladys Bejerano Portela.

An inspection department like this is obviously needed but is only part of the solution to a problem with deep roots. Hopefully if the new reforms work and the material situation of the population eases, some of the pressures promoting corruption will also ease. But of course a lot of corruption seems to take place where foreign companies interact with Cuban entities and that is not going to change.

In a widely noted speech in 2005 Fidel warned that while the revolution could not be overthrown by external intervention, it could be undermined from within –by corruption and the spread of a self-seeking culture in the apparatus.

### **Esteban Morales affair**

In April this year, 68-year-old academic and longtime Communist Party member Esteban Morales was expelled from the party because of an article he wrote –“Corruption, the True Counter-Revolution.” Here are some passages:

“When we closely observe Cuba’s internal situation today, we can have no doubt that the counter-revolution, little by little, is taking positions at certain levels of the state and government.”

“Without a doubt, it is becoming evident that there are people in positions of government and state who are girding themselves financially for when the revolution falls, and others

may have everything almost ready to transfer state-owned assets to private hands, as happened in the old USSR ...”

“... corruption is a lot more dangerous than the so-called domestic dissidence. The latter is still isolated; it lacks an alternative program, has no real leaders, no masses. But corruption turns out to be the true counter-revolution, which can do the most damage because it is within the government and the state apparatus, which really manage the country’s resources.”

He refers to the Carlos Lage and Perez Roque cases as well as Rogelio Acevedo. He stresses that the U.S. and other intelligence services are keenly studying what happens in Cuba:

“They’re looking for confirmation for the words of the commander-in-chief, watching closely what happens every day in Cuba, digging into everything that may allow them to find out where is the real counter-revolutionary force in Cuba, a force that can topple the revolution, a force that appears to be not below but above, in the very levels of government and the state apparatus.”[10]

The alarming thing is that this trenchant anti-bureaucratic polemic from the left got its author expelled from the party. Morales appealed but this was rejected. What is going on? This is hardly a good sign. It can only serve to intimidate those Communist Party members who want to raise real concerns.

## **OTHER PROBLEMS**

### **‘Dissidents’**

In March 2003, 75 people were jailed as paid U.S. agents. From that moment on they were 75 “political prisoners” to the West and its media. Most have now been released, the latest batch were freed in July and went to Spain –where a number of them subsequently complained that the authorities seemed to have lost interest in them!

Another manufactured “prisoner of conscience” was Orlando Zapata Tamayo who starved himself to death in prison in February. He was not a political prisoner but had been jailed for fairly serious criminal acts. Cuban doctors did everything possible to save his life (as acknowledged by his mother). But he was hailed by Washington and the European Union as a “political prisoner.” (A trenchant article by French academic Salim Lamrani sets out the issues.[11])

### **Party congress**

The Communist Party congress (the last one was held in 1997) was to have been held in November 2009 but at the Central Committee meeting in August 2009 it was postponed without any new date being set. As Raul said: “Because of the laws of life, this will be the last [congress] led by the historic leadership of the revolution.”[12]

The reason given for the postponement was the need to decide on how to tackle the problems of the economy. Also, arrangements for the post-Fidel and Raul era will have to be finalized and all this needs more preparation.

### **Transition of leadership**

The leadership generation that led the original revolution is slowly passing from the scene. They have fought world imperialism without flinching for over 50 years but they can't defy the laws of physiology.

There are many people on the left who think that when Fidel and Raul gone and if the embargo is lifted, the Cuban Revolution will be finished. I don't think this is anything like a certainty; there are many possibilities. There is a significant part of the population which fervently believes in the revolution and will fight to preserve it. But it is undeniable that Fidel has played an historic role. He has been an enormous factor in the equation of the struggle, just like Lenin before him.

The leadership transition that has been going on for some time is critical. A number of "test-tube communists" who looked very good for a while revealed fatal weaknesses. Hopefully, this is a relatively limited phenomenon and the Communist Party will push forward the leaders that the hour demands.

A useful chart and review showing the personnel making up the central Cuban party and state bodies as of April 16, 2009 has been prepared by the Open Source Center, a U.S. government intelligence body. Since this was published there have been some changes due to death (e.g., Juan Almeida), change of responsibilities or sacking (e.g., Rogelio Acevedo).[13]

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Imperialists howling**

Imperialism will *never* be reconciled to the Cuban Revolution. The reason is simple. Notwithstanding all its problems, Cuba shows what a socialist revolution can do. It is a constant negation of the madness of capitalism, a demonstration to the Third World –and not only it –that there is indeed an alternative path of development, that it is possible to build a society which really does put people's needs first.

George Bush set up his Cuba "transition office" to plan for the restoration of the "free market" once the revolution has been overthrown or collapsed. Obama is less crude but we can be absolutely sure the U.S. is still plotting and scheming to effect regime change in Cuba.

As Esteban Morales pointed out, the imperialists are undoubtedly counting on the internal weaknesses of the revolution. They hope that the current forced turn to the market will provide openings for capitalism.

And imperialism will keep banging on about human rights in Cuba. Considering the record of the United States, both at home and abroad, this is hypocrisy on a truly cosmic scale! But with the media behind you, mere facts don't present any insurmountable obstacle.

### **Revolution still fighting**

The Cuban revolutionaries will struggle no matter what. But as we know, there is no socialism in one country and Cuba's future is tied up with development of the international struggle – particularly with the progress of the revolution in Latin America.

That said, making the necessary reforms at home remains vital to easing some of the most pressing problems bedeviling Cuba and giving it a much-needed breathing space.

It is also important to understand that if the Cuban Revolution has its problems so does the other side. U.S. imperialism's quest for world domination has not been going so well lately.

Ever since 1959 the Cuban Revolution has been a tremendous example and inspiration to the revolutionary and progressive forces around the world. It has shown the power of the people united behind a revolutionary leadership. It has shown that bureaucratic degeneration is not inevitable, that the danger of Stalinism can be contained. And in an historically unprecedented way, Cuba's medical aid abroad has shown what human solidarity is capable of.

The Cuban Revolution is our revolution too and we should do everything we can to spread the truth and support it.

*Dave Holmes is a leader of the Socialist Alliance in Melbourne. This and other writings are also available at Dave Holmes' blog, Arguing for Socialism.*

### **Notes**

1. See "U.S. Blockade Causes Billions in Losses to Cuba."
2. Cuba's GDP at the official exchange rate is US\$56 billion but calculated at PPP (purchasing power parity) it is \$110 billion according to the CIA website at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cu.html>.
3. For some basic facts on the Cuban economy see <http://www.traveldocs.com/cu/economy.htm>.
4. See [http://www.cubasource.org/pdf/economic\\_illegalities.pdf#search=](http://www.cubasource.org/pdf/economic_illegalities.pdf#search=).
5. Patricia Grogg, "The Challenge of Boosting Productivity," Inter Press Service, April 30, 2008, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=42191>.
6. See <http://machetera.wordpress.com/2010/04/05/raul-castros-address-to-cubas-young-communist-league/>.
7. See <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47421>.
8. See <http://www.juventudrebelde.co.cu/cuba/2009-03-04/healthy-changes-in-the-council-of-ministers/>.
9. See <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=22348>.
10. See [http://progreso-weekly.com/2/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1589:corruption-the-true-counter-revolution&catid=36:in-cuba&Itemid=54](http://progreso-weekly.com/2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1589:corruption-the-true-counter-revolution&catid=36:in-cuba&Itemid=54).
11. See <http://www.voltairenet.org/article164489.html#article164489>.
12. See <http://www.france24.com/en/20090801-raul-castro-postpones-key-communist-party-congress->.
13. See <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/cuba/chart.pdf> and <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/cuba/overview.pdf>.