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Socialist Voice #19, October 6, 2004

Iraq and the Transition to Sovereignty: The Lies Continue

By Ernesto Gómez Abascal,
former Cuban ambassador to Iraq

Editors' Note: *We are reprinting in this issue of Socialist Voice an analysis of Iraq's supposed "transition to sovereignty" published in the June of this year in Cuba Socialista (www.cubasocialista.cu), journal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. The author is the former ambassador of Cuba to Iraq.*

Cuba has taken a principled stand against the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the imperialist occupation that continues. It has protested to the United Nations and other international bodies the affront to human rights and Cuban sovereignty of the U.S. concentration camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

In the article, the ambassador sharply criticizes those governments who have offered criticism of the invasion and occupation and yet do nothing to oppose it, or worse, who provide support in secondary capacities. This criticism applies directly to the Canadian government. It has committed thousands of soldiers to the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan, and it likes point out that in so doing, it is helping the imperialist effort in Iraq.

Cuba's stand on this current war and occupation is the same one it took during the 1990-91 imperialist assault on Iraq. The record of its stand at that time is contained in the Pathfinder Press book entitled, "U.S. Hands Off the Mideast!" (To order, go to www.pathfinderpress.com)

The ambassador predicts in his article that the resistance to occupation in Iraq will continue to deepen and that the U.S. its allies will fail to achieve a stable client regime that country. Events since this article appeared have confirmed that analysis.—Roger Annis and John Riddell

If it were not for all the lies, and the justifications based on lies from the very beginning in the operation to seize Iraq, this latest lie by itself would be enough to morally disqualify American policy and unmask their colonial objectives.

What sovereignty can a country have that is militarily occupied by nearly 200,000 foreign soldiers, among them some 140,000 Americans with authority that comes from Washington's colonial administration, at the head of which they have installed a leader that has been publicly recognized as an agent of the CIA?

The colonial operation that was carried out in Cuba at the end of the 19th century with the intervention and military occupation, and at the beginning of the 20th century with the creation of a pseudo-republic and the famous Platt Amendment forced into the Constitution, seems almost decent compared with what is being done in Iraq.

Perhaps the most shameful aspect of this is reflected not in the conduct of the officials of the empire, but in the officials of other great countries, that have constantly proclaimed themselves to be defenders of democracy and human rights and are now silent or assume a position of complicity with the new lies about the transition to sovereignty.

Most of them have abstained from criticizing the torture in the jails of Abu Gharib, an attitude which they have practiced for many years with the Palestinians in Israel. Their refusal to support the resolution presented by the Cuban government at the latest Human Rights Commission in Geneva calling for an investigation into what happened to the prisoners at the base of Guantánamo, once again unmask them. With what moral right do they presume to give classes on human rights to others?

A good part of the "major media" that has, as perhaps never before, exposed the manipulative character and outright lies used during the preparation for war, now helps the continuation of the farce. Will the media, in time, engage in self-criticism as the *New York Times* did recently, apologizing for having added to the lie and for having helped to create the American public opinion that war against Iraq was a necessity? What utter hypocrisy.

This "transition to sovereignty" manipulation and other aspects that comprise the extensive and complicated Resolution 1546 approved by the Security Council after much negotiation are framed within Washington's plan to stop its slide towards defeat. The neo-fascist and pro-Zionist administration that is in the power in the United States conceived this war with the objective of consolidating hegemonic power in the next few decades:

to seize the second largest petroleum reserve in the world;

to position itself militarily in a territory strategically situated in the heart of the Middle East, with access to the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, and which shares borders with two countries, Syria and Iran, whose governments Washington would like to destabilize and overthrow as being opponents to its interests.

to neutralize by the force and through “democratic reforms” the Arab and Islamic opposition and, after reducing the Intifada in Palestine, to promote the interests of Israel in the region. This dominion would allow Washington to consolidate its great hegemonic power and to avoid the upsurge of powerful rivals in the next decades, an objective that seems to be shared by partisan interests, even though the operation has been executed by the most reactionary and fundamentalist nucleus of the Republican Party. But the reality in Iraq, the resistance and the patriotism of the Iraqi people, that the empire did not count on due to its arrogance y great power, has called into question the consummation of these plans.

For that reason, without giving up its overall objectives, Washington now urgently seeks UN cover and goes to “old Europe” offering the participation that it previously refused to grant, but without conceding the military command of the occupation, a decisive element of power.

The execution of the plan insists on “Iraq-izing” the internal fight, forming “authorities and military forces” to confront the revolt and the patriotic struggle of the people, who are persistently described as terrorist—another useless lie. The situation could now descend into a reduction of their ambitions, the lowest point of which might be the withdrawal of U.S. troops, although this end does not seem imminent.

On a recent trip to several Middle Eastern countries I was able to meet and converse with a number of leaders, intellectuals, deputies, and people of various political and religious beliefs, and I obtained a clearer view of the situation in Iraq and the zone, characterized by two fundamental elements: while the United States has a military presence and a power as never before and it maintains a strong influence and intimidation on many governments, the hatred towards the great power has also reached extreme levels and possibly no other geographic area in the world feels as much belligerence against Washington. A few weeks ago, in an interview granted to the newspaper *Le Monde*, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, someone who could hardly be suspected of maintaining an anti-American attitude said: “Never before has there been so much hatred against the United States in the region as there is now.”

The injustice and the abuse are what nourishes this popular feeling that necessarily express itself in revolt and this, in my opinion, will be what charts the future course of history. Although the theoreticians of the empire have proclaimed the end of history, the people will continue writing it.

The United States, as I have said, will not leave Iraq easily, but its military and political situation is delicate. Right now the U.S. is evaluating the shipment of another 15,000 more soldiers to augment the 150,000 already there, but it does not learn from history. In the second decade of the last century, the British army used more than half a million men to seize Mesopotamia and ended up withdrawing after suffering thousands of losses.

The fundamental characteristic of the war at the moment is that the occupiers are on the defensive, and the Resistance is more and more organized and effective and is the one that decides when and where to act. The occupation is precarious and where the American forces or

its allies are not present, which is most of the country, there is no authority or the authority is that of the Resistance. It is evident that the forces of the occupation have been forced to withdraw, having lost the battles of Fallujah, Ramadi, Nayef, Kerbala, Kufa, Sadr City in Baghdad and other places that they don't tell us about. We can suppose that are many liberated zones in Iraq where the Resistance exerts control.

The main freeway between Baghdad and the Jordanian border, a stretch of about 600 km, is a daily scene of operations by the Resistance, which controls it by sections and frequently destroys the provisions that supply the armies of occupation. Something similar happens with the other important route, the no. 8, that begins at the Kuwaiti border in the south.

The United States and their allies in the war thought that with the occupation of the country they could quickly create a very lucrative business with petroleum and the reconstruction and use it to repay the expenses of the war and to make huge profits. It was an operation planned as a great investment whose recovery, immediate and abundant, was considered a certainty. This, which is not spoken of as much, is perhaps what is most causing them to feel that there is a crisis.

Before the war, the export capacity of Iraqi crude, which had deteriorated considerably because of the 10-year blockade, reached at the most 2.8 million barrels a day. The average was lower, but since the occupation, they have not reached even half that and at times, like in the last weeks, it has been reduced to around 500,000 barrels.

The main pipeline, which goes through Turkey to the port of Ceyhan, has been paralyzed most of the time due to sabotage, and the pipelines that go south towards the Gulf have also undergone frequent damage. The Resistance has prioritized these vulnerable targets.

The actions against the technicians employed by the huge corporations of the reconstruction—many of whom have left—and the general insecurity that exists in the country is creating unforeseen problems for the occupiers' plans to gain economic possession of other important resources. Far from obtaining great profits, the expenses of the war are immense and continue to grow.

In the political sphere, the resistance to the occupation is very generalized, even among sectors that apparently do not maintain a belligerent attitude. The United States even distrusts, and with reason, the Iraqis who are part of the institutions created by Washington. Its great dilemma is that it does not have base of support within the population.

Approximately two months ago the Iraqi National Constitutional Congress was publicly celebrated in Baghdad, with more than 500 delegates representing political, social, and religious organizations from all over the country. Among the participants were nationalistic Arabs and Kurds, Socialists, patriots of various stripe, Sunni, Shiite and Christian, as well as members of a split of the Communist Party called "blocks." The Shiite clergyman Moqtada Sadr sent a message of greetings.

All to them proclaimed themselves against the foreign occupation in what could be considered a kind of broad front that could play a positive role of unity and resistance in the future. The celebration of this event also gives an idea of what little control the North American government exerts in the Middle Eastern country.

The latest manipulative lie of the empire, spread once again with insistence in the past few days by the major media, is to try to identify the patriotic Resistance with the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda. Washington wants to show that it was correct to attack Iraq because of the connections with terrorists who attacked the Twin Towers on September 11, although those connections were denied recently by the American Governmental Commission that investigated that event.

The clumsy attempt to clean up these big lies has a lot to do with the election process in November and the aspirations of George W. Bush to be reelected and prolong the power of the neo-fascist and pro-Zionist nucleus that surrounds him.

The possibility should not be exclude that, in order to support this latest vile trick, groups of American and Israeli Special Forces are acting in Iraq, organizing terrorist actions against the civilian populace and certain religious sectors, to promote divisions, internal fights, and conflicts in order to create rejection of the resistance and to prevent the consolidation of national unity against occupation. Criminal actions that point in this direction and correspond to this logic are happening.

Lying as a policy is a characteristic of fascism. To denounce it without rest is our duty.

Socialist Voice #20, October 12, 2004

Washington's 'Regime Change' Plan for Cuba

by Dr. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada

Text and introduction by [Progreso Weekly](#): On October 12th, the international workshop on 'Democracy and the Role of Local and National Governments' was held at Camilo Cienfuegos University in the city of Matanzas, Cuba. That meeting was attended by, among others, numerous legislators and academicians from the United States, Mexico and Spain.

The president of the National Assembly of the People's Power (Parliament) of Cuba, Dr. Ricardo Alarcón, participated in the meeting and explained aspects of the 'Plan for Assistance to a Free Cuba' designed by the administration of President George W. Bush. We bring to our readers Dr. Alarcón's remarks in full because we believe them to be of importance both for the Cuban-American community and the rest of the people of the United States.

To speak of democracy here and now demands above all to say something about the moment Cuba is going through. This time, I shall leave aside the economic war that has been imposed upon us for 45 years and the numerous aggressions, including terrorism, our people have suffered during this long period. I shall limit my presentation to explain some fundamental aspects of a document of more than 450 pages approved by the government of the United States that was published last May 6 under the title "A Plan for Assistance to a Free Cuba."

It is so aggressive and provocative that it has been criticized even by individuals and institutions that are well known for having devoted an important part of their lives to denigrating the Cuban Revolution. One of them described the plan as "terrifying" and as "the most explosive [development] in the relations between the United States and Latin America in the past 50 years."

Let's see what that famous document contains, and for this I shall cite their own words. From the start, it announces that its aim is "to bring the Cuban regime to a swift end" and specifies that "the cornerstone of our policy to hasten an end to the Castro regime is to strengthen policies of proactive support to the groups we back inside Cuba," and that—for that purpose—the current budget of \$7 million will be raised to \$59 million.

With those measures and the intensification of the economic blockade and their aggressive actions they're confident that they will defeat the Revolution and install here what they call a transition government that would be directed by a U.S. functionary who would begin to work starting now and whose job description is Transition Coordinator.

The nature of that transition and its content are described in minute detail in the plan. The first step, which must be concluded in less than one year, will be the return of properties—homes, land, etc.—to their former owners, which they describe as "the Gordian knot" of the transition. They do not fail to indicate, of course, the procedures to carry out evictions and firings, dissolution of cooperatives and to demand huge payments of back rent. The plan makes it clear who will look after this troublesome matter: "The government of the United States will establish

a structure to direct the return of properties, the Commission on the Restitution of Property Rights, to expedite the process.”

The nation’s economy, all its branches and all social services—among them public health and education – will be privatized. That enormous task also will be handled by Washington. The plan describes it thus: “The government of the United States will establish a Standing Committee of the United States for Economic Reconstruction.”

It’s a detailed plan. I shall barely touch on the topic of social security. I shall read what the Empire tells our retirees: “The Cuban economy and government budget after transition may not be able to sustain the level of unearned benefits and the lax requirements for eligibility that the communist system permitted.” In other words, no more checkbooks, no more pensions.

Don’t be alarmed, though. Let’s continue to read the Yankee plan: “Create a Cuban Retiree Corps to give jobs to those without resources, if they are in good health.” And just so nothing is left out, it makes it clear that that Corps would “develop a broad program of public works on a major scale.”

We know that it’s impossible to strip the people of everything, to wipe out all of their achievements, to impose upon them such exploitation. It will simply never happen, because we’ll make sure to prevent it.

The writers of the plan point out modestly that “it won’t be easy” to carry this out. That’s why they stress the following: “As an immediate priority, the government of the United States will help establish a truly professional civil police force and will offer assistance for its technical training by the U.S. Department of State, which will bear the responsibility for its total organization and direction.”

Among the principal tasks of that repressive organization, “totally organized and directed” by Washington, would be—and I quote again from the plan—to “prosecute the former functionaries and members of the government, the party, the security forces, the mass organizations and other pro-government citizens, also many members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. The list could be long.”

The American plan overlooks nothing; it covers all aspects of life. It aims not only to dominate Cuba but also to place under U.S. control the economy, the services, all social activities and, in fact, to carry out the annexation of this country, under some local imaginary authorities who would be totally submissive to a foreign power.

Cuba would lose every vestige of sovereignty and independence. Cubans would be stripped not only of the achievements attained through the Revolution but also the most basic attributes. Not only would they lose forever their freedom and dignity and the right to health care, education, culture, and social security, they would also lose their homes, their lands and their jobs, and they would be obliged to work to pay an invented debt to the former exploiters. In other words, a new and brutal servitude would be imposed upon them. Cuba would cease to exist and Cubans would be turned into slaves.

That is why the National Assembly of the People's Power called it by its real name: a plan to annihilate the Cuban nation.

It is remarkable, therefore, that its writers took the trouble to describe in detail the features of this future Cuba and also that they devoted a full chapter to its alleged political structure. What for, if Cuba would have disappeared by then? How to explain that apparent contradiction?

The only possible explanation is that they propose to annihilate Cuba and also to kill its example. They will make our country disappear and eliminate even its memory from the minds of people. That's why they devote so many pages to a massive exercise in deceit.

Evidently, they can't even attempt to confuse the Cuban people. The message to them could not be clearer and more direct: to wipe out all Cuban men and women, the present and future generations, to take everything away from them, to reduce us to nothing.

Who could they confuse here? The farmers, who once again would be evicted from their lands? The families, who would be evicted from their homes? Some who would also have to pay, to the last penny, what (according to Washington) they owe the former owners? The retirees, who would lose their pensions and be forced to work until they die? A whole people who would no longer have schools and hospitals and would never again receive, as a sacred right, free medical care and education?

In Cuba, they can't deceive anyone. Here, the unanimous response is a total, firm rejection, without any hesitation. Here, they will find a people who will fight tooth and nail, will struggle to the last man and woman, no matter their age, and they'll struggle to the end, but will never return to slavery.

The fact that they're not even trying to deceive the Cubans is made more obvious by the fact that, as part of the plan, they included a set of measures that they're already implementing and all those measures are defined by their hatred against our people. They punish in a cruel, pitiless and illegal manner those who live in Cuba and the emigrants who live in the United States.

Thousands of families here and there are under absurd prohibitions that prevent them from visiting each other and make normal communication impossible. They are prohibitions that are not applied to anyone else, that violate the international standards of human rights and the United States Constitution itself.

Those who act this way, do they really expect to gain the sympathy of their victims? What this shows, beyond any doubt, is that these people don't care what Cubans feel or suffer. Only irrational hatred, without limit and control, can explain that behavior.

The purpose is to deceive others, and they lie and falsify reality because they want to prevent at any cost other people from seeking their liberation and struggling to achieve justice in the future. They tremble at the thought that the Cuban project will haunt them like a ghost, even after they manage to destroy it—something they can never accomplish. That is why the lies rise to a pitch of hallucination.

For example, when they talk about vaccinating our children or combating illiteracy. These absolutely ridiculous proposals are not the only amazing fantasies in this plan, which contains other, no less surprising proposals. These two, however, have achieved notoriety because they come from a country where more than 45 million people, among them many children, lack health-care services, a country with a severe shortage of vaccines and whose problems in the educational sector are notorious, including the urgent need to impart literacy to many of its politicians.

Let us see, even if in passing, some of the things they have the gall to mention in the chapter devoted to what they call future democratic institutions in Cuba.

First of all—and surely nobody should be surprised—the starting point is that the future structure of our country would be dictated by Washington. Of course, they know how to do it; they have experience and they say so with an honesty for which we're grateful. Let us quote the words contained in Chapter Three of the plan: "The lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq will serve as guidelines for any participation by the United States in the process of constitutional reform in Cuba."

As a consequence of this, you would disappear. Nothing would remain of the People's Power. Nothing would be left of the beautiful, noble and creative project that was born here, precisely here, in this land whose beauty draws nourishment both from nature and history. The experience of Matanzas would be replaced by the sad and sordid experience they would import from Afghanistan and Iraq. Can you imagine this, only for an instant? Fallujah and Abu Ghraib, even for a moment, a single second?

Matanceros, forget Matanzas. Mr. Bush, the almighty, the all-knowing, he who can do anything he pleases has a plan, and he tells us that he's going to impose it upon us by blood and fire.

Forget the idea that everyone can vote, even if he's black, even if he's a humble laborer. Forget the idea that anyone can put forward someone else's candidacy, even if one or the other is black or a humble laborer. And the fact that the people elected live just like those who elected them and in addition report to them on their activities. And the fact that no one lives at someone else's expense and no one receives prebends or privileges.

Mr. Bush has other ideas. He has a plan, his plan, no more, no less. Let's continue to review it, to see what else it foretells.

Voters would no longer have the power to submit candidates directly. That would be the task of the electoral parties, that is, the machines (controlled by money) that in the so-called "representative democracies" replace the popular will.

But they're not talking about just any kind of party. The plan makes it clear that they would be the same groups that Washington has been manufacturing and financing since 1959 through the CIA and the Cuba Program. According to the plan, "the Cuba Program would be greatly expanded to directly support the creation and development of political parties and interest groups."

The mercenary groups invented by the CIA would mutate into the parties of the future, which would continue to be paid and directed by the CIA, because “the government of the United States,” and I quote again from the plan, “would carry out specific programs at national, provincial and municipal levels to create and organize grassroots political parties.”

Voters could no longer nominate and select candidates all by themselves. The organizations that represent the whole of the population couldn't do it for the nation and the provinces, either. Candidates could not run for municipal assemblies composed entirely of citizens who, as we all know, were submitted and elected directly by the voters themselves. All this would be handled by the parties that, as we saw, would be manufactured, directed and paid by the government of the United States.

It goes without saying that the plan totally eliminates the obligation of the delegates and deputies to render accounts—periodically and regularly—to those who elected them. It also eliminates the principle of revocation and all forms and manners of popular participation and linkage between the population and their representatives. All that would disappear.

Since the government in Washington would choose the candidates, direct them and pay them, that foreign government would control the whole process and totally usurp popular sovereignty. I must say that this aspect reveals, in a particularly stark manner, the annexationist and colonialist nature of the plan. Not in the United States, not even in Puerto Rico does the federal government interfere to such an extent with local elections.

Cubans would no longer have the right to vote. Whereas the plan is ridiculous when it discloses plans for the vaccination of children and literacy projects, in this context the plan is pathetic. Cubans would simply lose their natural right to become voters automatically, upon reaching the established age. Automatic, universal and free voter registration in a public and accessible electoral register would no longer exist. According to the plan, which I again quote from, “it may be necessary to compile an entirely new voter list,” and this would be done, listen to this carefully, “as is done in the United States.”

At this point we arrive to a bit of cynicism that is frankly grotesque, when the plan defines the U.S. system as “voluntary self-enrollment.” What does this strange little phrase conceal? Is it that any North American becomes a voter simply by wishing to become one and writing his name on the voter list?

The reality is exactly the opposite. The electoral history of that country is, to a great degree, an uninterrupted series of battles that millions of North Americans have had to fight—and still must fight—to earn the right to register and, after they do, to be allowed to vote, and finally—as if the previous steps were not enough – to have their votes counted, a dream come true.

In the United States, federal, state and local authorities are not required to guarantee, or even facilitate a citizen's inscription on the voting register. This country, which spends hundreds of millions of dollars in electoral propaganda and disburses lavish amounts of public money to the campaigns of Republicans and Democrats—two deceitful faces of a single and solitary electoral apparatus – does not have the mechanisms needed to facilitate an electoral franchise.

Registration is simply not something that interests the authorities. Let the citizens register, if they can overcome the various restrictions and regulations established by the authorities, who do endeavor to impose restrictions and regulations that make it difficult for citizens to register. Some writers have pointed out that the United States is the only developed country that does nothing to enable citizens to register.

It does a lot, however, to deprive them of their franchise and exclude them from voter lists. The whole world recalls the shameful elections of the year 2000 and many people are saying they fear the situation will be repeated next month.

Various organizations that defend civil rights, along with representatives of the African-American population, have ceaselessly denounced the threats that hang over their heads. Tens of thousands of blacks are removed from the voting register in Florida without an opportunity to appeal that arbitrary manipulation of alleged criminal records. Just to give you an idea of the racism that exists there: according to the press, that situation affects 22,000 blacks, about 60 Latinos and not a single white person.

The use of different voting mechanisms, including voting machines of questionable efficacy or machines that make a recount impossible, join other tricks—the most notorious of which is the media's excessive coverage of a contest between demagoguery and banality.

At this moment, numerous institutions of all kinds. Among them outstanding personalities of the world of art and culture, are conducting an intense campaign throughout the country to try to register people to vote and give them the information and means they need to do so.

Why should they devote their time and resources to that task? Do we need greater proof that to a substantial sector of the U.S. population—to millions of people – becoming registered voters is almost the equivalent of accomplishing a prowess?

Those who attempt to impose upon others the North American electoral model have an insurmountable problem in their hands. The majority of the people do not believe in such a model. On top of all that, not even 50 percent of those who enjoy the difficult privilege of being listed on the voting register bother to vote. And the number of those who appear as voters is inflated by fraud, by tricks that allow some to vote several times—among them, many visitors from beyond the grave.

To ensure the complete reconversion of [Cuba's] electoral system, the U.S. government would dictate laws and regulations, appoint advisers and train functionaries and employees at all levels. And remember that any protest would be crushed by the new police, a force that would be under the full direction and control of the State Department.

Before closing, let me return to my address to the National Assembly of the People's Power on July 1: "For certain, it will be impossible for them to turn their sinister plans into reality. First, they would have to invade this country, occupy it militarily and later crush the resistance of our people, and that they will never accomplish.

"We are ready and willing and fight to the last man or woman to prevent this. If they attack us, they will find here a united and educated people, the owners of a glorious history of heroism,

struggles and sacrifices in the quest of freedom, who will never renounce their independence or their ideals of justice and solidarity; who will never renounce the beautiful, noble and profoundly human work they managed to accomplish despite the aggressions of the Empire. If they attack us, they will suffer here their worst and most shameful defeat.”

Let the Empire make no mistake. We say so from this city whose name is a reminder of five centuries of resistance, from this province that was founded on a rebellion against slavery, from this land that never again will be vilified and humiliated. All of us Cubans will fight to the end for this land: the Cubans of today, of tomorrow, and also our parents and our grandparents.

Because “our dead, arms upraised, still will defend it,” we shall fight on to victory—always.

Socialist Voice #21, October 19, 2004

Russian Labour Still Reeling from Capitalist Shock Therapy

David Mandel. *Labour After Communism: Auto Workers and their Unions in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2004. 283 p. \$28.99

Reviewed by John Riddell

Editors' Note: *The following article is reprinted with permission from the October/November 2004 issue of Relay: A Socialist Project Review. Join David Mandel for a discussion of his pathbreaking study of the working class in the ex-Soviet Union Saturday, October 30, at 7.30 p.m., at the Centre for Social Justice, 3rd Floor, 489 College St. (west of Bathurst) in Toronto.*

The collapse of the Russian economy in the early 1990s, brought on by marketization sponsored by the rich capitalist states, plunged the Russian labour movement into the Dark Ages. Since then, little information has been available on the conditions and struggles of Russian workers.

David Mandel's *Labour After Communism* breaks the silence. Co-founder of the School for Workers Democracy, which conducts rank-and-file labour education in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, Mandel shares his unrivaled knowledge of the union movement in these countries, drawing on innumerable discussions with workers and worker activists.

Shock Therapy

Mandel shows us a Russian working class as devastated by economic collapse and the fierce onslaught of bosses and government—a class still groping to find the path to an effective response.

The “shock therapy” applied in Russia after 1991 led not to a capitalist flowering but to a social catastrophe whose depth and duration is without parallel in any industrialized society. Mandel marshals the key statistics: industrial production down 55%, capital investment down 80%, research and development down 90%.

Only the resource sector has been integrated into the world market, he notes. Elsewhere, investment is practically nil and the human capital necessary to revive industry has been dispersed.

During the last few years, Russia has experienced a slow economic recovery, but Mandel questions whether it is sustainable.

Russia's present social order, vividly portrayed by Mandel, lacks the mainspring of a capitalist economy: profitable private investment in the production of goods and services. Instead, the Russian “bourgeoisie” is “essentially [a] rent-seeking class, intimately linked both to the corrupt state administration and to the criminal underworld.” Indeed, as the recent jailing of Khodorkovsky, the oil baron, demonstrates, “in Russia, the state appoints the millionaires and billionaires.”

The scale of personal wealth is greater, but otherwise, all this is reminiscent of the Stalin-to-Brezhnev era. So too is Mandel's statement that "to workers, the new bourgeoisie is not a class of wealth-generating 'captains of industry' but a gang of rapacious pillager."

Mandel does not attempt to characterize Russian society today. But it appears that some of the barriers to capitalist restoration erected by Russia's 1917 October revolution have survived, even if in highly distorted form.

Labour's Decline

The economic collapse after 1991 shattered the labour activism of the final Soviet years. Suddenly workers faced mass unemployment, a 2/3rds fall in real wages, and a decline in living conditions so stark that male life expectancy decreased five years. Workers were hampered by the consciousness inherited from the Soviet era, which in Mandel's view was marked by submissiveness, cynicism, and "a weakly developed sense of dignity." Nor could they, during the years of "Neo-Liberalism" triumphant, draw inspiration from the example of labour upsurges in other countries. As a result, Mandel says, the work force is deeply demoralized.

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that labour activism has followed a downward curve over the last 13 years. Nonetheless, Mandel argues that in factories where workers have found a way to fight back, they have won significant gains.

The same lesson can be drawn from his detailed discussion of conditions in Ukraine and Belarus. His Ukrainian examples show that the socialist consciousness of even isolated individual militants has a great impact. Belarus provides a "control," where shock therapy was not applied, the Soviet-era economy is still largely intact, and investment and production levels have been largely maintained.

Focusing on the auto industry, where international outreach by the Canadian Autoworkers provided him with a wealth of contacts and information, Mandel points out that militant workers in Russia have very rarely been able to utilize the structures of their official trade unions for resistance. These unions found it easy, in the early nineties, to transfer loyalty from the Communist Party to their factory administrations, and function in most respects as company unions.

Mandel's vivid anecdotes show how the ideology of "social partnership" with the employers works its way through all levels of the union, eliminating it as a vehicle for shop-floor resistance. For the North American reader, this portrayal awakens a bitter reflection: In the weaker sectors of *our* labour movement, things are not much better. And even our strongest private sector unions see no alternative to going cap in hand to the government, asking for subsidies to the employers.

Yet there is a difference, and it is decisive. North American employers' offer of "social partnership" is patently insincere: they aim to be rid of the unions, and unions that wish to survive must find a way to resist. The Russian ruling elite, however, is too weak to do without its union prop, which has given "social partnership" a shabby stability.

Independent Unionism

Mandel draws hope from the survival, under the most difficult circumstances, of Russia's independent union movement, whose guiding principle is not social partnership but working-class independence.

Denied any legal rights or standing, constantly harassed by the bosses, official unions, and legal authorities, the independent unions have eked out an existence as minority currents made up of the boldest and most committed workers.

Mandel profiles one of the most successful of these ventures—Edinstvo (Unity), which counts about 3,000 members among the 100,000 workers in the world's largest auto factory, in Togliatti. Through difficult years it has known ups and downs. But it has been sustained, Mandel tells us, because "its members are convinced of a basic conflict of interests separating them, as workers, from management and they believe that they can defend themselves through independent organization."

The gains have been tangible: wages, for example, are twice as high in the Togliatti complex as in Russia's other major auto factory of this type.

Edinstvo and the other independent unions lack a vision of an alternative, socialist society. Nonetheless, Mandel sees in it a beacon of hope: "Edinstvo has a deeply committed leadership that lives and breathes union and that has refused to let the daily grind of union work stop it from thinking strategically."

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‘Mighty Empire Fears Small Rebellious Island’

By Felipe Pérez Roque

Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, under United Nations General Assembly Agenda Item #28, “Necessity of Ending the Economic, Commercial and Financial Embargo Imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.” New York, 28 October 2004. Reuters reported that this speech “was the only one loudly applauded.” Later that day the General Assembly voted in favor of the resolution condemning the U.S. embargo against Cuba by an overwhelming 179 to 4 (U.S., Israel, Marshall Islands, and Palau).

Excellencies:

Millions of Cubans are now closely following what happens in this hall.

Some 70% of them have had to endure all their lives the longest blockade in history, imposed by the Government of the United States on our homeland right from the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

However, in voting today on draft resolution “Necessity of Ending the Economic, Commercial and Financial Embargo Imposed by the United States of America against Cuba,” the 191 UN Member States will not only be making a decision on an issue of interest to Cuba. They will also be voting in favor of the respect for the Charter of the United Nations, in favor of the respect for International Law, in favor of the sovereign equality of States and the self-determination of the peoples, so that no government, mighty as it may be, can punish not only Cuba but also any other country for trading with and investing in ours.

Today, we will cast a vote against the extraterritorial enforcement of laws; a vote against haughtiness and the disdain for the rights of others.

I have an odd document here, distributed by the United States to all delegations – except Cuba, of course.

It lies so much, and so many times, that it deserves to be commented on.

Let us see:

“The United States maintains that the embargo is a bilateral issue that should not come before the General Assembly. It is clearly not a blockade, as we do not interfere with the trade between Cuba and other nations.”

But this General Assembly knows that there is a different truth to it. Well does it know that it is not just an embargo; it knows that the US Government has unleashed a worldwide genocidal economic war against Cuba. Cuba is prevented from exporting to the United States; Cuba is prevented from receiving American tourism; we are prevented from gaining access to the technologies produced in this country; Cuba is prevented from importing any US product, equipment or raw material.

The Assembly knows that the Torricelli Act, which prevents the subsidiaries of US companies in third countries from trading with Cuba, has been in force since 1992 and is meticulously enforced. I will just mention a few examples:

- The Canadian subsidiary of US Picker International could not sell spare parts for X-ray equipment to Cuba because it is a branch of an American company.
- France's Bull could not complete the sale of ATM's to Cuba because it was bought by America's Diebold.
- Refractorios Mexicanos, a company from Mexico, was purchased by US Harbison Walker Refractory – and thereafter it could not continue selling to Cuba heat-resistant bricks used in furnaces for cement production.

The US representative is well aware, even with expressions to the contrary, that nobody in the world can sell a product or piece of equipment to Cuba if containing more than 10% of US components.

- The import of a quadruple veterinary vaccine, which should have been supplied to our country by the Netherlands' Intervet, was curtailed when the US Government informed the aforementioned company that it could not sell the product to Cuba because it contained 10% of an antigen made in the United States.

On the other hand, the US Government prevents any company in the world from exporting a product or piece of equipment to the United States if containing Cuban raw materials. A Japanese car manufacturer has to certify to the US Government that the metals used to make the automobile do not contain any Cuban nickel. A European confectioner has to prove that no Cuban sugar was used.

The US document also says the following:

“The embargo regulations apply only to persons or entities subject to US jurisdiction.”

If so, then why, after seven years of investigations, was Canadian citizen James Sabzali sentenced last February by a Philadelphia Federal Court to a year's probation and a US\$10,000 fine for having sold to Cuba some resins that purify the drinking water supplied to the Cuban population?

Why does the Torricelli Act prevent vessels of the rest of the world from calling at Cuban ports under the threat of being “blacklisted” and denying their access to American ports for a period of six months?

Why does the Helms-Burton Act, in force since 1996, penalize the businesspeople from the rest of the world who attempt to engage in business deals with Cuba?

The General Assembly has been informed that last 4 May the US State Department sent a letter to the Chairman of Jamaica's SuperClubs, warning him that if his business with Cuba did not terminate within 45 days he would be penalized under the Helms-Burton Act – which involved the denial of visas for him and his family to travel to the United States and the threat of facing a lawsuit in the future in US courts.

The Government of the United States prevents Cuba from using the dollar as currency for trading operations with the rest of the world. Our charges or payments in that currency are confiscated.

Is it true or not, Mr. US representative, that your Government imposed a US\$100 million fine on Switzerland's banking entity UBS for the latter's reception of dollar transfers from Cuba following the accrual of absolutely legal earnings in our tourism and trade?

As of last June, the media controlled by the Miami-based terrorist groups of Cuban origin unleashed a gross campaign aimed at frightening the banks that may have financial relations with Cuba.

At the same time, we have been receiving continuous reports that US authorities are exerting pressure on an ever-increasing number of banks from other countries in order to thwart the transfers originating in Cuba.

Finally, last 9 October, Daniel Fisk, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, in addition to recognizing the efforts of the US Government to boycott tourism to Cuba from Europe, Canada and other countries, announced that the United States has set up a Group for the Persecution of Cuban Assets with a view to freezing the movements of hard currency towards and from Cuba.

As a result of the foregoing, we concluded that all necessary actions had to be promptly implemented in order to defend our country from the new aggressions that attempt to prevent the use of the dollars that we earn to pay for our imports. Therefore, 72 hours ago our President, Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro, informed the public opinion of the decision to replace the circulation of the dollar with that of the convertible Cuban peso all across the national territory. On this new episode of the US blockade and about our sovereign measures to defend ourselves, the Permanent Mission of Cuba is conveying additional information to each delegation.

Would the US delegation explain why Cuba does not receive and has never received a credit from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank? Because the US Government prevents them from doing so. In 2003, these two international banks, which are not American-owned or are legally under its control, loaned US\$ 14 billion to Latin America. Why was not a single dollar lent to Cuba to build houses, roads, hospitals or schools? Is it not Cuba in the center of the map of the Americas?

It is true that over the last three years we have been able to purchase food from the United States. However, we can still see the draconian obstacles imposed on those sales, such as the need for bureaucratic licenses, the obligation to pay in advance and in cash without the possibility of receiving not even private credits and the prohibition for Cuban vessels to carry the goods.

The US delegation also maintains that its Government has introduced measures "facilitating greatly the export of (...) medicines and medical supplies" to Cuba.

However, the General Assembly knows, once again, that there is a different truth to it.

The truth is that this year the US Government prevented Abbott from selling to Cuba two essential drugs in the treatment of AIDS patients: Ritonavir and Lopinavir+Ritonavir. Therefore, Cuba had to purchase them in another country, with a six-fold increase in price.

The truth is that the US Government imposed a fine of US\$ 168,500 on Chiron Corporation because a European subsidiary of such company had sold – reportedly by mistake – two children’s vaccines to Cuba.

The American text distributed to those present here goes on to add that “Cuba is using this resolution to justify its own political and economic woes.” If the US Government is so sure that Cuba uses the issue of the blockade as a pretext, why does it not lift the blockade and leave us without a pretext?

I am going to answer that to you: because the US Government is afraid. It is afraid of our example. It knows that if the blockade on us is lifted, Cuba’s socio-economic development will spiral up. It knows that we will further prove the possibilities of the Cuban socialism; the as-yet-untapped potential of a country without any discrimination whatsoever, with social justice and human rights for all citizens and not only for a few. It is the Government of a large and mighty empire, but it is afraid of the example of the small rebellious island.

Excellencies:

We are gathered here only five days away from the elections in this country, awaited by all with secret hopes. It is true that these four years have been terrible for the world.

Cuba, however, awaits and works with optimism and confidence. It knows that it is right. It knows that time is in its favor. It sees the ever-increasing rejection of the blockade right within the United States. It does not forget that the blockade has cost us over US\$ 79 billion. Cuba knows that if the blockade is lifted, within a few years there will be a tremendous improvement in the living standards of its citizens. It knows, for example, that in 10 years our country would build 1 million new houses, into which some 4 or 5 million Cubans would move.

Cuba also knows, Excellencies, that if the blockade is not lifted and there is no end to the hostility that has been in place for over four decades now, everything will continue to be difficult but not impossible. Our people are sure that there is no human or moral constraint capable of hindering their course towards a more prosperous and just country.

It is true that for the last 12 years the US Government has disregarded the resolutions adopted by this Assembly with ever-increasing support, which demand the end of the blockade against Cuba. But that does not diminish the importance and momentousness of the act to be discharged today by each delegate on behalf of their people.

Therefore, on behalf of the Cuban people, whose sons and daughters have gone to heal, teach, build and fight side by side with every country that ever needed the Cubans; on behalf of the memory of the 2,000 Cubans who laid down their lives fighting colonialism and apartheid in Africa; on behalf of the 22,474 Cuban health cooperators currently rendering services in 67 countries of the Third World; on behalf of the Cuban professors who are now teaching over 17,000 youths from 110 countries in our schools free of charge; on behalf of five young Cuban

heroes who are enduring cruel and unjust prison terms for fighting terrorism; in sum, on behalf of a small country that is harassed for wanting to be free, I would like to ask you, once again, to vote in favor of the draft resolution submitted by Cuba.

Thank you very much.