

Contents

- 116. Haitian Masses Move Forward Against Foreign Occupation.
Roger Annis
 - 117. Thousands March in Montreal Against Israel's War on Lebanon.
Sandra Browne and Robert Johnson
 - 118. Why Socialists Must Campaign for Troops Out Now.
Katan Alder and James Haywood
 - 119. The Social Economy and the Bolivarian Revolution.
Michael A. Lebowitz, Jean-Pierre Daubois
 - 120. Hugo Chavez: 'The Future Is Yours, Go and Construct It'.
Coral Wynter and Jim McIlroy
 - 121. Cuba Condemns Israel's Aggression
-

Socialist Voice #116, August 6, 2006

Haitian Masses Move Forward Against Foreign Occupation

By Roger Annis

Sometimes even the best-laid plans of the powerful go astray. Such was the case in Haiti in February of this year when Haitians turned out in overwhelming numbers to elect René Préal as president. Préal, who first served as president from 1996 to 2001, is an ally of the deposed President Jean Bertrand Aristide, and thus his election was a powerful rebuke to the foreign powers, including Canada, that conspired to overthrow Aristide's government in February 2004.

The US, France, and Canada drove Aristide from office because his government sought to protect Haiti's poor majority from the worst ravages of the world economic order. Aristide's foreign policy measures, including the forging of diplomatic and economic ties with Cuba, were deemed equally unacceptable. This placed Aristide and his popular, mass-based movement, Lavalas, at odds with the economic powers in the Caribbean region, for whom he and his government served as a dangerous example.

With Aristide shipped out of the country and Haiti's foreign-appointed "interim government" brutally suppressing dissent, and in the face of a growing international outcry over systematic human rights violations by the coup regime and occupying force, the local and foreign elites needed the legitimacy of an election to justify the coup. But the Haitian masses refused to be intimidated on election day, and soundly rejected the elite's chosen candidates.

The plan, and its unraveling

In spite of significant barriers to participation, Haiti's poor majority mobilized in massive numbers on election day. Leading up to the election, a complex electronic voter registration system had been put in place that effectively disenfranchised many. Less than one-tenth the number of polling booths were made available compared to the last election six years ago. Many poorer, heavily populated districts in the capital, Port au Prince, had few or no polling booths,

while many rural voters had to travel long distances in order to cast a ballot. Lineups were long on voting day and required lengthy waits. And on the day of the vote, many polling stations opened late or required protest action by voters in lineups before doors were opened at all.

The election was organized and administered by a “Provisional Electoral Council,” an extra-constitutional (and therefore illegal) authority that was established by the post-coup regime. Funding and many staff were provided by the foreign occupation powers. Canada was a key contributor. Officials of Elections Canada, including its director, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, were central figures in the planning and administration of the election.

“Préval called on his supporters to stay in the streets and block the apparent attempt by the election authorities to steal the vote.”

Initially it seemed as if Haiti’s election was to be stolen and handed to the elite’s favoured candidate. Haiti’s constitution requires that a presidential candidate receive fifty-percent-plus-one of the vote, or a run-off vote is required. As the “official” count for Préval dropped further and further below fifty percent in the days following February 7, widespread protests broke out in Port au Prince. Préval called on his supporters to stay in the streets and block the apparent attempt by the election authorities to steal the vote.

Then, on February 14, news images hit television screens in Haiti and around the world of piles of ballots marked for Préval burning or otherwise left scattered in a Port au Prince garbage dump. This clear evidence of vote tampering did much to undermine the legitimacy of the Provisional Electoral Council and United Nations agencies, who were responsible for the security of the ballots and their proper counting. Anger in the streets exploded, and rallies of tens of thousands of people paralyzed the capital. The elites were finally forced to bow to the reality that Préval had won an overwhelming first-round victory. His closest rival received a scant twelve percent of the vote.

A reassertion of Haitian sovereignty

The new Préval government has set a priority on ending the foreign occupation. Newly appointed Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis declared in early June that his government will work to create the conditions for Haiti to recover its sovereignty. “No true Haitian can accept the presence of foreign troops on the national territory,” he told the newly elected Haitian Senate.

Alexis acknowledged, however, that a foreign presence was necessary in the short run because the country does not have the necessary police and military power to defend the new government and to assure safety in daily life for ordinary citizens.

Préval has repeatedly spoken of the need for fundamental social reform for Haiti’s poor majority. In a statement issued in late March entitled “Less poverty, more hope,” he declared, “Though ravaged, Haiti is not the wretched land as so often described in the media. It is a land of hope for more than eight million people. I cannot achieve miracles, nor have I been promising any. But I feel I have the responsibility to the Haitian people to open doorways on a brighter future: less poverty, less inequality, more wealth, more hope.

“This is why I ran again for president.”

The new government has put forward an economic program that will focus on promoting tourism and agriculture. The government will also encourage foreign investment in light manufacturing, and seek foreign funding to repair Haiti’s devastated natural environment and its social infrastructure. So far, Préval has received important commitments of aid from Venezuela and Cuba, and Haiti has been welcomed into the Petrocaribe program initiated by Venezuela, which offers cheap oil to the poor countries of the Caribbean. Cuba has promised to extend and expand its medical mission in Haiti and its free medical training of young Haitians.

Many problems persist, however. Six months after the presidential elections, there are still several hundred political prisoners languishing in Haiti’s jails. They include Yvon Neptune, who was Prime Minister in Aristide’s government, and Haiti’s most beloved folk singer, So-Anne Auguste. The total prison population numbers some 4,000, most of whom have never been charged with a crime. Haiti’s Ministry of Justice is still largely staffed by officials appointed after the coup or who are otherwise beholden to anti-popular forces.

While some prisoners have begun to be released, it’s not fast enough for most Haitians. Many believe the new government could and should be moving more decisively to gain their release. An open letter to Haitian authorities calling for the rapid release of prisoners has been signed by more than one thousand people, and the number of signatures is growing. The letter and signatures were printed in the June 30 edition of the weekly newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*. Activists are planning protest actions to highlight their concerns.

Canada’s role in the occupation of Haiti

Along with France and the United States, Canada is one of the three main pillars of the illegal coup and foreign occupation in Haiti. Troops from these three countries and Chile invaded in February 2004 and “secured” the country in the months that followed, before passing Haiti to the current 9,000 member UN-sponsored occupation force. The UN force is drawn mainly from Brazil and Chile, but also includes troops and police from such disparate countries as Jordan, China, and Sri Lanka.

Canadians continue to hold key advisory positions in government ministries. They head up the UN police force, and the RCMP has spent the past two years training the notoriously repressive Haitian National Police. Several Canadian military officials hold high-ranking positions in the UN occupation authority, known by its French acronym, MINUSTAH.

To this day, not a single member of the Canadian Parliament has denounced the coup, nor the human rights disaster that followed. After much prompting by solidarity activists, some New Democratic Party MPs began to voice concern about human rights violations in Haiti, and foreign affairs critic Alexa McDonough began to refer to the coup as the “removal” of Aristide from office (the occupiers describe the coup as a “voluntary departure” by Aristide).

The NDP’s only call to action has been to ask the Canadian government to investigate conditions in Haiti. But a government investigation is meaningless without a recognition of Canada’s own role in creating those conditions. This was amply demonstrated in late May and early June, when

the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development held extensive hearings on Haiti. Questioning by MPs and testimony by government and “democracy-promotion” witnesses were entirely self-congratulatory and uncritical of Canada’s policy.

Following a trip she made in May of this year, McDonough spoke very favorably of Canada’s ongoing role.

The occupying powers have yet to declare that they will respect the new government’s request for an end to the foreign occupation, and the precise division of powers and chain of command between the newly elected government and the UN mission has yet to be clarified. This sets the stage for more political confrontation between the Haitian masses and the occupying powers if the occupation is perceived to be dictating or unduly interfering in government policy.

NGOs and the “strategic use of aid”

The coup in Haiti revealed a new and nasty side of Canadian foreign policy: a concerted effort to draw non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into the operations of the imperial ambitions that now drive Canadian foreign policy.

Writing in reference to Afghanistan in the March 2006 issue of *Walrus* magazine, Sean Maloney and Tom Fennell explained:

“One unique aspect of the new [Canadian military] strategy is the way that development and humanitarian aid are being used specifically for the purpose of building loyalty toward coalition forces and democratic reforms. The American, British, and Canadian governments all have representatives from their international development and relief agencies stationed in Afghanistan; the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) alone plans to spend \$616 million there by 2009. [...]

“The strategic use of aid may offend some, but this approach is gaining credibility and has been adopted by CIDA and Foreign Affairs.”

In Haiti, some of Canada’s best-known NGOs were either supportive of the 2004 coup or silent on the massive human rights violations that followed. Development and Peace, the international aid organization of the Catholic Church, for instance, responded to critics of its Haiti policy in a Background Paper in March 2006 in which it wrote, “The international media has shrouded the departure of Aristide on 29 February 2004 with conspiracy theories, going so far in some cases as to claim that the CIA deposed the president in a coup d’état... In fact, Aristide himself was largely responsible for the circumstances that led to his forced departure.”

The Haitian Platform to Advocate for an Alternative Development (PAPDA) is a Haitian NGO closely partnered with the Quebec-based Alternatives NGO. In January 2004, PAPDA issued a statement in which it, “praises the courage and foresight of the Haitian people who are mobilizing in greater numbers every day to demand the resignation of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. PAPDA is happy to associate itself with this demand and reiterates its conviction that President Aristide’s departure constitutes an essential element of any real way out of the crisis facing the country today.”

The director of PAPDA, Camille Chalmers, is a member of the board of directors of Alternatives. Most of the latter's funding is provided by the Canadian International Development Agency.

Development and Peace and its partners in Haiti were among those who applauded Aristide's "departure" from office. On March 25, 2004, its Quebec director, Marthe Lapierre, told the Canadian Parliament Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, "I'd like to begin by saying that what characterized President Aristide's government was its inability to govern, which is not necessarily the case now. It seems to me the transitional government that has been appointed does have some ability to do that...it is creating hope among the Haitian population, based on what we've observed."

Common to all the Canadian and Haitian NGOs who supported Aristide's "departure" was a scandalous failure to protest the human rights violations that followed the coup. Extensive human rights investigations were sponsored or issued in 2004 and 2005 by such reputable organizations as the National Lawyers Guild in the United States, the Harvard University Faculty of Law, the School of Law at the University of Miami, and Amnesty International. They all painted a grim picture of killings and jailings of Aristide supporters by UN forces and the Canadian-trained Haitian National Police, as well as destruction of the Haitian economy and social infrastructure.

Yet the following commentary is typical of the organizations that either called for or applauded Aristide's removal. In February 2006, Francois L'Ecuyer of Alternatives wrote, "Put in place in the days following the departure of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the interim government set to work on the heavy job of rebuilding the country. Initially, an important part of the population was prepared to support this government..." The article then goes on to report the utter failure of this same government to govern effectively, without any explanation as to why, nor of the massive rights violations over which it presided.

An article by the same author in May 2006 reviews the challenges facing the new, elected government in Haiti without any reference whatsoever to the severe damage done during the coup years.

OXFAM Quebec maintained a similar silence on the suppression of democracy in Haiti in its annual report for 2004-2005.

The democracy-promotion agency of the Canadian government, Rights and Democracy, has also been a strong supporter of Aristide's "departure."

Challenging "Responsibility to Protect"

The foreign intervention in Haiti is the first fruit of the new "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, authored by prominent liberals in Canada and increasingly accepted as policy by the United Nations. Under its terms, the great powers of the world grant themselves the authority to declare a people or country "failed" and then intervene militarily to install compliant governments. This doctrine was analyzed by Anthony Fenton in the December 2005 issue of Briarpatch.

Haiti represents a considerable challenge to progressive forces in Canada. The Canadian government has emerged unscathed from its complicity in the overthrow of Haiti's elected government and its direct hand in training that country's notoriously brutal police force. If such practices, and the doctrine underlying them, are not challenged, then we will see more foreign policy adventures similar to Haiti and Afghanistan. This bodes very badly for the future of political and social rights, not only abroad, but increasingly at home as well.

Solidarity committees sprang up across Canada in 2004 in response to the terrible news coming out of Haiti. That year, these committees formed the Canada Haiti Action Network to coordinate solidarity across the country. Members of the network held a meeting in Montreal in May of this year and pledged to continue their work. Priorities in the coming months will be:

- To continue exposing Canada's complicity in the detention of political prisoners in Haiti and the flagrant violation of Haiti's constitution pertaining to the rights of arrested and detained persons.
- That Canada withdraw its police and military forces from Haiti, under terms set by the new Haitian government.
- To end the use of aid money and NGO projects as weapons that undermine the institutions of the sovereign government of Haiti. Instead, Haiti needs massive amounts of aid with no strings attached for rebuilding the shattered economy and social infrastructure.

In the recent election in Haiti, the Haitian people mobilized massively to impose their desire for a democracy and social progress and for an end to foreign occupation. Canadians should respond by stepping up solidarity with their struggle.

Roger Annis, co-editor of Socialist voice, is a coordinator of the Vancouver-based Haiti Solidarity BC and the Canada Haiti Action Network. This article was published in the August 2006 issue of Briarpatch Magazine

Socialist Voice #117, August 14, 2006

Thousands March in Montreal Against Israel's War on Lebanon

By Sandra Browne and Robert Johnson

MONTREAL – Between ten and fifteen thousand people marched here on August 6 in a powerful protest against Israeli war crimes in Lebanon. The turnout was particularly significant since the action was organized on short notice and at the height of the summer vacation season in Quebec.

More than 50 organizations sponsored the protest, many of them expressions of the Lebanese and Middle Eastern communities of Quebec. (There are 40,000 Lebanese in Montreal alone; many have been there for several generations and are well integrated into Quebec society). A good number of the demonstrators were Lebanese and the action was effectively organized as a kind of “voice of Lebanon” representing the different currents of Lebanese society, united in their desire for justice and peace in Lebanon, and against the Israeli atrocities. The Lebanese flag was omnipresent. There were also many Palestinian flags and various speakers who mentioned the Palestinian struggle received a warm response.

However, it was also apparent that many of those present were not of Middle Eastern origin. We spoke with a quite a few who said that they were participating out of a sense of solidarity with the Lebanese and Palestinian people and to oppose the Israeli slaughter. This reflects the deep antiwar sentiment in Quebec, which opinion polls consistently show to be much stronger than in the rest of Canada.

The main Quebec union federations co-sponsored the protest, as did three political parties, the Parti Québécois, the Bloc Québécois, and Québec Solidaire. Leaders of these unions and political organizations addressed the closing rally, as did Denis Coderre, a former federal cabinet minister speaking in the name of the Liberal Party of Canada (Quebec section).

Another strength of the Montreal protest was the political prominence given to the participation of small contingents of people who identified themselves as Jews. Representatives of two of these groups spoke to the closing rally and were particularly warmly received.

The political weight of the demonstration was reflected in the media coverage. Several Quebec television networks broadcast reports of the action and at least three of the Montreal daily newspapers featured it on their front pages with an article and a photo. *AlJazeera.Net* reported on the Montreal action as well as on protests in Windsor, Ontario, another city with a large Arab population, that were directed against Canada's pro-Israel stance. Noting plans for several fact-finding trips to the region by Members of Parliament, *AlJazeera* concluded that “the criticism may be having an effect.”

The August 6 protest was organized around four demands. The leaflet read:

“We call on all Quebecers to DEMONSTRATE with us to:

- *Demand, immediately, a cease-fire without conditions;*
- *Demand the respect of international conventions, international law and “all” UN resolutions on the Middle East;*
- *Insist that the Harper government disassociate itself from the policies of the US and work for justice and peace in the Middle East;*
- *Show our solidarity with the Lebanese and Palestinian people.”*

New forces join the fight

Many of the participants brought their own hand-lettered placards, often conveying a powerful message of protest not only against Israel and the U.S. but also Stephen Harper. These included “Harper, stop spitting on Palestine and Lebanon,” and “Harper ferme ta Bush” [Harper shut your mouth – a play on the French word for mouth, “bouche”], One Lebanese community group organized a particularly moving display with three small coffins on the ground, each draped in a white sheet with a small bouquet on top. A large color photo of one of the child victims of Israeli bombs was placed behind each coffin.

One placard carried by a number of demonstrators carried the title “Zionist checklist.” It listed a number of categories such as hospitals, roads, power plants, women and children with a checkmark against each category, The last line read “Hezbollah;” it had no checkmark. A few other placards read, “The Arab League is silent.”

In an outrageous infringement of democratic rights, police intervened to confiscate some Hezbollah flags. This may have intimidated some people, but we saw at least 50 Hezbollah flags throughout the crowd, and a scattering of large photos of Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah. A leaflet headed “What is Hezbollah?” which answered many of the slanders against the organization, was widely distributed and well received.

There were a small number of union flags and placards, but most union members who participated in the protest did so as individuals. The same was true for the political parties and currents who were present. We saw one banner each from the Communist Party, Québec Solidaire, the New Democratic Party, and the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist). There were no literature tables of political groups, no sales of political newspapers within the crowd, and only a few political groups handing out leaflets.

Political challenges

Many features of the protest, including the limited character of its demands, reflected the fact that many of the participants were becoming involved for the first time in political action against imperialist war. As such it represented a significant strengthening of the antiwar forces.

The weight of this development was also shown by the fact that the BQ, the PQ, and the Liberal Party, sought to use the protest to strengthen their position against Stephen Harper’s Conservatives. They aim to use the issue of the war to deprive the Conservative Party of the additional Quebec seats it needs to form a majority government after the next federal election.

The August 6 action was organized around a simple framework, “Quebec stands up for justice and peace in Lebanon ... NOW!” and the four demands quoted above. This was clearly the right approach to achieve the kind of unity that was the strength of the protest, particularly with the entry into struggle of new and broad community-based forces.

However, the call for the action contained a number of significant omissions and concessions. It demanded an unconditional cease-fire but did not demand that Israel withdraw from Lebanon. It also acknowledged Israel’s supposed “legitimate right to exist” and its supposed right to security. It did not mention the resistance of the Lebanese people against the aggression. It demanded the application of all U.N. resolutions on the Middle East, presumably including resolution 1559 that requires the disarming of Hezbollah. There was no mention of Iraq or Afghanistan.

In the days leading up to the protest, the Quebec-Israel Committee, which outrageously claimed to speak for the entire Jewish population in Quebec, published several large ads in the newspapers challenging organizers of the protest to “think of Israel” and insisting that they dissociate themselves from Hezbollah and Hamas. Leaders of the protest obviously felt some pressure from this quarter.

Many speakers and photo displays effectively exposed Israeli war crimes. But only one of the speakers at the closing rally expressed solidarity with the fighters of the Lebanese resistance. Many leaned in the direction of deploring the violence of both sides. Most speakers did this with a light touch, while emphasizing Israeli atrocities. One exception was Denis Coderre who bluntly denounced “the rocket attacks of both Israel and Hezbollah.” The crowd responded with sustained booing.

Gilles Duceppe, leader of the Bloc Québécois (BQ), followed him to the podium and echoed similar themes: both sides should stop fighting, Israel’s reaction is disproportionate, we are for disarming all militias including Hezbollah. Duceppe was more adroit than Coderre in his presentation and he was generally well received – although the crowd responded to his statements against the resistance with silence, then resumed its applause when he turned his fire against the Canadian government.

(Standing next to Duceppe during his presentation was a BQ Member of Parliament who was introduced as the first Member of Parliament of Lebanese descent in Canada. It is apparent that the BQ has a strong base of support in the Lebanese community in Quebec.)

The protest lasted more than four hours, including a march of at least two hours through downtown Montreal. By the end of the lengthy closing rally, the crowd had dwindled to a few hundred or so. Those who left early missed the two best talks of the event. Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss of the Neturei Karta (www.nkusa.org), a group of anti-Zionist Orthodox Jews, gave a rousing, uncompromising speech: “We pray to God for the speedy and peaceful dismantling of the state of Israel.” He voiced the view that Zionism, a political outlook, conflicts with Judaism, a religion, and that the state of Israel is a racist state and against God. He stated that the present conflict is not one between Muslims and Jews and he recalled the many centuries during which Jews had lived in peace with the Muslim world before the advent of Zionism. The demonstrators responded to his points with several sustained ovations.

The representative of *Échec à la guerre*, the Quebec antiwar coalition, followed with a forthright anti-imperialist presentation. He explained that for the Lebanese, the question was submission or resistance, and he saluted the courage of the resistance fighters. He denounced the proposed United Nations resolution drafted by the United States and France as completely unacceptable since it does not even demand that Israel withdraw its troops from Lebanon. He linked what was happening in Lebanon to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and pointed out that Canadian troops form part of a large army of occupation in Afghanistan; that army should be withdrawn immediately. While other speakers had attacked Harper for spinelessness or for being Bush's poodle, this speaker insisted that Harper was acting effectively on behalf of Canadian corporate interests.

All in all, this was a very successful and powerful protest, one that offers a promising basis for further actions against the imperialist war drive.

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Why Socialists Must Campaign for Troops Out Now

An Appeal to the Young Socialists of Britain on the Iraq War

By Katan Alder and James Haywood

Editors' note: As imperialist war rages across the Middle East, some socialists in the imperialist countries still stand aloof from the antiwar movement. One noteworthy case is that of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party. In the 1960s and 1970s, the SWP and its co-thinkers around the world spearheaded the building of a mass movement against the Vietnam war. They have now abandoned that heritage: no one from the SWP or any of its affiliated groups has played any role in building demonstrations or other actions against the imperialist assault on Iraq. They have remained on the sidelines, condemning those who are trying to build an antiwar movement as "middle class radicals."

This outrageous position has not gone unchallenged, as the powerful document below illustrates. It was written by two members of the Young Socialists, the youth group of the SWP's sister organization in Britain. They have been trying to convince the Young Socialists and its parent organization, the Communist League, to change course and join in building the antiwar movement.

The leadership of the Young Socialists and Communist League stifled such discussion. On August 4, Alder and Haywood were informed that their position, unheard and unread, had been rejected as petty-bourgeois. The two then submitted the following declaration together with their resignation from the Young Socialists. – Roger Annis and John Riddell

1. The war waged by the British, U.S. and other foreign forces on Iraq, an oppressed nation, is an imperialist war. It has taken the form of a direct military assault, invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, previously a sovereign nation. This war has to be understood in a broader context of heightened imperialist threats abroad, the occupation of Afghanistan, the recent attack on Lebanon by Israel, the 'long war' promised by senior bourgeois politicians both at home and abroad, and the further introduction of 'anti-terror' measures directed against the fighting capacity of working people. The ruling class has staked its authority on being able to successfully prosecute these wars, without being challenged. Building a movement that does challenge their wars is central to Marxism today, as is understanding the need for unconditional defence of the Iraqi peoples' right to self-determination.

2. Imperialist wars occur, not because of the wills of certain politicians who occupy commanding heights of the bourgeois state, but because capitalism, in its highest stage, imperialism, is driven to constantly wage wars of plunder, conquest and national oppression. This analysis applies to the Iraq war — a war waged to:

- i) Guarantee that Iraq's oil reserves come under British and American imperialist control, and generally reorganise Iraq's economy for the benefit of participating imperialist

powers, opening up markets for both commodities and capital investment, and thus hoping to gain an edge over their competitors.

ii) Stage a vital lesson to governments, oppressed people, and workers and farmers, that those who oppose the dictates of monopoly capital can expect the 'Iraq' treatment.

iii) Oppress the Iraqi people, deny their sovereignty and their right to a nation through direct political and economic control.

iv) Gain a stable launch pad for further military interventions within the Middle East, including against Iran and Syria.

3. The war abroad in Iraq is directly linked to the war at home – to 'our' rulers' declining profit rates and crisis-ridden world system, coupled with their inability to move working people to their political agenda. This forces them to attack us and our living standards. The war at home also takes an ideological form — constant disinformation by the big business press, growing censorship, and the intimidation of journalists who publish critical articles on the occupation. One of the intended effects of this propaganda war is an attempt to stop working people from showing solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Iraq, which not only further divides working people internationally, but also makes it harder for workers to resist the offensive by the same bosses in this country.

4. Through struggles against imperialism and wars of national oppression a communist method of action has been forged, starting from:

i) Our complete opposition to imperialist wars.

ii) Our scientific understanding of their cause and historically reactionary character.

iii) The need for an organised class-struggle response, coming from the working class and its allies.

iv) The understanding that class struggle, of which the movement against imperialist wars is a vital part, taken to its logical conclusion, is a struggle for power.

v) The necessity of forging a party of the Leninist type, recruited from the most advanced workers, capable of leading working *people and their allies to power*.

5. Communists and Young Socialists should be aiming to lead the struggle against 'their' imperialists, including imperialist war drives. We orient to the workers organised both in and out of trade unions, and to all those who are appalled by the war — including working class Muslims and youth, who have been especially outraged by the war, and attempt to turn their legitimate anger against the millionaire exploiters and thus deal massive blows to our rulers through struggle on the streets.

6. In conflicts between imperialism and oppressed nations, communists unconditionally side with the oppressed nation, independent of the oppressed country's political leadership. Putting this policy in practice, Fidel Castro supported Argentina (a semi-colonial nation) in its 1982 war with Britain over the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands, despite Argentina's brutal dictatorship. The Cuban

Communists argued for this line throughout the war and all subsequent events, including Argentina's eventual defeat.

7. This policy was also advocated by the *Militant* in its issue of April 28, 2003, with regard to the Iraq war: "In a war between an imperialist power and a nation oppressed by imperialism, class-conscious workers always side with the oppressed nation — regardless of its political regime — and argue that the defeat of the imperialists in the war is in the interests of working people everywhere, including those living in the imperialist country."

8. Communists unconditionally support the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. This support is given unconditionally — we don't put conditions on our support for the struggle against imperialism. We view the fight of the Iraqi people against imperialism as progressive, and defend them and support them against 'our' imperialists. Our support for the Iraqi people against imperialism continues from before the war, during the war, and carries on during the occupation, independent of the struggle's political leadership. Thus, it is unconditional support for their right to self-determination. Unconditionally supporting the Iraqi people against imperialism is a grounding block for beginning to build international working class unity. (Marx on Ireland.) This is especially true since it is 'our' nation which is oppressing the Iraqi people. We do, therefore, have an urgent duty to support the struggle against 'our' imperialist troops.

9. Every aspect of the struggle against British imperialism in Iraq is progressive, regardless of its leadership; this includes those led by the Baathists. Our support for this struggle is part of our consistent unconditional support for the Iraqi people's right to self-determination. Withholding support to those struggling against 'our' imperialists in Iraq fails to understand:

i) That our support for the Iraqi people is unconditional, not based upon the character of their government or leadership, but upon the fact that the struggle of an oppressed people against Imperialism is historically progressive, and the counter-struggle waged by imperialism is historically reactionary.

ii) That every defeat suffered by imperialism in Iraq is a victory for the Iraqi people, as it will weaken their oppressor, leading to further openings in political space, vital for the formation of genuine national liberation movements.

iii) That growing difficulties for the British ruling class in Iraq weakens that very class which exploits workers and their allies in this country, allowing breathing space for workers in conflict with imperialism across the world, for instance in Venezuela.

iv) That the Iraqi people have every right to struggle under a leadership of their choosing.

10. This does not stop communists from taking a firm stance against instances where the national bourgeois forces move against the working class. This was Lenin's meaning when he wrote "Insofar as the bourgeois of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But insofar as the bourgeois of the oppressed nation fights for its own bourgeois nationalism, we are against." ("Rights of Nations to Self-determination," in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works* [1977], vol. 1, p. 581. emphasis in original)

11. “If in our political agitation, we fail to advance and advocate the slogan of the right to secession, we shall play into the hands... of the bourgeois.” (Lenin, as before) There is no third camp communists can set up tent in. We are either with the unconditional right to self-determination camp, or in the imperialist camp. Through the publishing efforts of Pathfinder, we are fortunate in that we have a rich collection of books and pamphlets that document how revolutionaries have defended self-determination in the past.

12. By being the most consistent builders of the protests, and their most conscious section, communists and Young Socialists are able to mobilise and lead the movement on an anti-imperialist course of action, making it increasingly difficult for the ruling class to continue its war against the Iraqi people. Communists and youth should blaze the way in:

- i) Organizing broad united fronts against the war.
- ii) Mobilising the masses in the streets against our common enemy.
- iii) Calling for Troops Out Now, and self-determination for the Iraqi people.
- iv) Supporting action that is organizationally and politically independent of the capitalist parties and politicians.

13. In areas where these united fronts already exist already, communists and young socialists should consider joining these coalitions in order to help build the protests. Through this mass work, our units will be brought into contact with radical youth and workers, and it is from here that we can recruit and build certain layers of a communist organisation. In protests and actions which do not call for troops out now, we should follow the *Militant*'s analysis, which has urged participation in peace marches and other actions, where communist views can be advanced, even if the event organisers do not agree with them. (Feb 2004)

An example of this is the mass work the Young Socialists did in building the World Youth Festival in Venezuela last year. We inspired many people around us with our ability to work together with different forces, and at the same time fighting around keeping the festival on an anti imperialist course. We met many new and different political forces; we gained a huge amount of experience, and we made a significant impact on the festival from an international level right down to the local level.

We should be doing the same kind of mass work inside the anti-war movement as well. We must expose the lies and distortions inside the anti-war movement by liberal and petit-bourgeois forces, but we should also work with them to organize mass protests like the ones we have already witnessed over the Iraq war. Imagine the possibilities if we could make these protests into genuine fights against imperialism, and imagine the recruitment opportunities we would have inside the movement. Right now our forces are small and it will take time to reach such a stage, but with consistent work we will gain a huge amount out from building and organizing the anti-war movement in this country and everywhere else.

14. Since the initial anti war demonstration of over one million in February 2003, anti-war activity has declined, but not disappeared. They are now rising again with the imperialist slaughter in Lebanon and Palestine. Communists can still do important work in these groups,

including building them further with our co-workers and fellow students, keeping the action in the streets and independent of the bosses, explaining why it is important that we call for Troops Out Now (and not in a little bit), leading educational activity, and explaining to those that we meet how the anti-war movement is inextricably linked to the struggle for a workers and farmers government and a socialist future.

UK and All Imperialist Troops Out of Iraq Now!

Self-Determination for the Iraqi People!

Socialist Voice #119, August 17, 2006

The Social Economy and the Bolivarian Revolution

Articles by Michael A. Lebowitz and Jean-Pierre Daubois, republished with permission from The Bullet, #31, August 10, 2006, a Socialist Project e-Bulletin

Going Beyond Survival: Making the Social Economy a Real Alternative

by Michael A. Lebowitz

Mike Lebowitz taught at Simon Fraser University and is now living in Caracas. His latest book is Build it Now: Socialism for the 21st Century (2006) available from Monthly Review Press.

The rations of slaves were never fixed. And so, too, it has always been possible within capitalism for workers and citizens, through their struggles, to secure themselves some share of the benefits of social labour. Capitalist globalisation and the offensive of neoliberal state policies, however, encroached upon all those gains from past struggles; and the answer to those who were surprised to find those victories ephemeral was the mantra of TINA — that ‘there is no alternative’. Yet, as the devastation of the capitalist offensive has become obvious, opposition has emerged especially in Latin America. Working people around the world look here these days for the demonstration that ‘a better world is possible.’

But, are they right to look here? Is a real alternative emerging here or is it merely a negotiation of better terms in the implicit contract with capitalist globalisation? Is it possible for a new social economy or solidary economy to develop within the nooks and crannies of global capitalism or are those islands of cooperation nurtured by states, NGO’s and church charities merely positive ‘shock absorbers’ for the economic and political effects of capitalist globalisation?

I propose that in the five Latin American countries where opposition to neoliberal state policies has produced recent important governmental changes, there is only one case at present where the changes occurring can make the social economy a real alternative to capitalism. Let me indicate my premises and my reasoning.

Firstly, what constitutes a real alternative to capitalism? I suggest that it is a society in which the explicit goal is not the growth of capital or of the material means of production but, rather, human development itself — the growth of human capacities. We can see this perspective embodied in the Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela — in Article 299’s emphasis upon ‘ensuring overall human development’, in the declaration of Article 20 that ‘everyone has the right to the free development of his or her own personality’ and in the focus of Article 102 upon ‘developing the creative potential of every human being and the full exercise of his or her personality in a democratic society.’

In these passages (which are by no means the whole of that constitution), there is the conception of a real alternative — a social economy whose logic is not the logic of capital. ‘The social economy,’ President Hugo Chavez said in September 2003, ‘bases its logic on the human being,

on work, that is to say, on the worker and the worker's family, that is to say, in the human being.' That social economy, he continued, does not focus on economic gain, on exchange values; rather, 'the social economy generates mainly use-value.' Its purpose is 'the construction of the new man, of the new woman, of the new society.'

Beautiful ideas. Beautiful words. But, of course, only ideas and words. The first set comes from a constitution and the second, from the regular national educational seminar known as 'Alo Presidente'. How can such ideas and words be made real? I want to propose four preconditions for the realisation of this alternative to capitalism and then want to talk about what has occurred in Venezuela.

1. Any discussion of structural change must begin from an understanding of the existing structure — in short, from an understanding of capitalism. We need to grasp that the logic of capital, the logic in which profit rather than satisfaction of the needs of human beings is the goal, dominates both where it fosters the comparative advantage of repression and also where it accepts an increase in slave rations.
2. It is essential to attack the logic of capital ideologically. In the absence of the development of a mass understanding of the nature of capital — that capital is the result of the social labour of the collective worker, the need to survive the ravages of neoliberal and repressive policies produces only the desire for a fairer society, the search for a better share for the exploited and excluded — in short, barbarism with a human face.
3. A critical aspect in this battle of ideas is the recognition that human capacity develops only through human activity, only through what Marx understood as 'revolutionary practice,' the simultaneous changing of circumstances and self-change. Real human development does not drop from the sky in the form of money to support survival or the expenditures of popular governments upon education and health; nor is it fostered by the petty tutelage and hierarchical decision-making of statist societies. The conception which challenges the logic of capital is one which explicitly recognises the centrality of self-management in the workplace and self-government in the community as the means of unleashing human potential — i.e., the conception of a social economy, a solidary economy, indeed, of socialism for the 21st century.
4. But, the idea of this solidary economy cannot displace real capitalism. Nor can dwarfish islands of cooperation change the world by competing successfully against capitalist corporations. You need the power to foster the new productive relations while truncating the reproduction of capitalist productive relations. You need to take the power of the state away from capital, and, you need to use that power when capital responds to encroachments — when capital goes on strike, you must be prepared to move in rather than give in. Winning 'the battle of democracy' and using 'political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie' remains as critical now as when Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto.

Are these conditions present in the new Latin American governments on the Left? On the contrary. For the most part, the pattern displays the familiar characteristics of social democracy

— which does not understand the nature of capital, does not attack the logic of capital ideologically, does not believe that there is a real alternative to capitalism and, accordingly, gives in when capital threatens to go on strike. (This is a perspective crystallized in the statement of the social democratic Premier of British Columbia in Canada at a time when I was Party Policy chairman — ‘We can’t kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.’) While it is too soon at this point to judge the course of developments in Bolivia, let me suggest that something different has been happening in Venezuela. I want to turn to that now — both what has happened and the current struggles.

The Venezuelan Path

The Bolivarian Constitution does not only stress the goal of human development. It also is unequivocal in indicating that human beings develop their capacity only through their own activity. Not only does Article 62 declare that participation by people is ‘the necessary way of achieving the involvement to ensure their complete development, both individual and collective,’ but that Constitution specifically focuses upon democratic planning and participatory budgeting at all levels of society and (as in Article 70) upon ‘self-management, co-management, cooperatives in all forms’ as examples of ‘forms of association guided by the values of mutual cooperation and solidarity.’

With its emphasis upon a ‘democratic, participatory and protagonistic’ society, the Bolivarian Constitution definitely contains the seeds of the solidary economy, the seeds of socialism for the 21st Century; and, those particular elements continue to inspire the Venezuelan masses. Yet, that constitution also guarantees the right of property (Article 115), identifies a role for private initiative in generating growth and employment (299) and calls upon the State to promote private initiative (112). That constitution, in short, supports continued capitalist development, and this was precisely the direction of the initial plan developed for 2001-7. While rejecting neoliberalism and stressing the importance of the State presence in strategic industries, the focus of that plan was to encourage investment by private capital — both domestic and foreign — by creating an ‘atmosphere of trust’.

To this was to be added the development of a ‘social economy’ — conceived as an ‘alternative and complementary road’ to the private sector and the public sector. But, it is significant how little a role was conceived for the self-managing and cooperative activities by which the ‘complete development, both individual and collective’ of people was to be achieved. Essentially, this was a programme to incorporate the informal sector into the social economy; it is necessary, the Plan argued, ‘to transform the informal workers into small managers.’ Accordingly, family, cooperative and self-managed micro-enterprises were to be encouraged through training and micro-financing (from institutions such as the Women’s Development Bank) and by reducing regulations and tax burdens. The goal of the State was explicitly described as one of ‘creating an emergent managerial class.’

Class struggle, however, nurtured the seeds of that social economy so that it increasingly was seen as the alternative to capitalist development. Even though the initial measures of the government to allow it to pursue its ‘Third Way’ orientation were not an attack on capitalism as

such, the response of Venezuela's pampered oligarchy (supported fully by US imperialism) — first through its coup of April 2002 and then through the bosses' lock-out of the winter of 2002-3 — mobilised the masses in workplaces and communities and drove the Bolivarian Revolution along a path moving away from capitalism.

As government revenues revived in the latter part of 2003 (with the effective re-nationalisation of PDVSA, the state oil company), new missions in health and education began to demonstrate the real commitment of the Bolivarian government to wipe out the enormous social debt it had inherited. Mission Mercal, building upon the experience of government distribution of food during the general lockout, began in early 2004 to provide significantly subsidized food to the poor (and continues to expand at the expense of the capitalist sector). Yet, the question remained — how were people to survive? How could the growing confidence and sense of dignity felt by the exploited and excluded as they emerged from the education programs be nurtured rather than disappointed?

The answer in part was the creation in March 2004 of *Mission Vuelvan Caras* (Turn your Faces), a programme for radical endogenous development oriented to building new human capacities both by teaching specific skills and also preparing people to enter into new productive relations through courses in cooperation and self-management. And, the context in which this was occurring was one in which President Chavez was directly attacking what he called the 'perverse logic' of capital and stressing the alternative — that social economy whose purpose is 'the construction of the new man, of the new woman, of the new society.'

While productive activity under these new relations has been expanding (with the number of cooperatives increasing from under 800 when Chávez was first elected in 1998 to almost 84,000 by August 2005), though, how much of an alternative to capitalism can this provide? The new cooperatives fostered and nurtured through *Vuelvan Caras* are destined to be small and not likely (certainly at their outset) to be major sources of accumulation and growth. Nevertheless, in their emphasis upon replacing the system of wage-labour with one based upon cooperation and collective property, they are a microcosm of an alternative to the logic of capital; and, since the general lock-out, they have been complemented by a drive for self-management and co-management on the part of workers both in state industries and also in closed factories.

In the last year, solidarity rather than self-interest has become a major theme in discussions of the social economy (now renamed socialism for the 21st century). Drawing upon Istvan Meszaros's discussion (in his *Beyond Capital*) of Marx's conception of the communal society, President Chavez a year ago called for the creation of a new communal system of production and consumption — one in which there is an exchange of activities determined by communal needs and communal purposes. We have to build, he announced in his July 17 '*Alo Presidente*' programme, 'this communal system of production and consumption, to help to create it, from the popular bases, with the participation of the communities, through the community organizations, the cooperatives, self-management and different ways to create this system.'

At the heart of this conception is protagonistic democracy — the combination of democratic development of goals at the community level and democratic execution of those goals in

productive activity. New communal councils (based upon 200-400 families in existing urban neighbourhoods and 20-50 in the rural areas) are a critical part of this process. These institutions are now being established to democratically diagnose community needs and priorities. With the shift of substantial resources from municipal levels to the community level, the support of new communal banks for local projects and a size which permits the general assembly rather than elected representatives to be the supreme decision-making body, the new communal councils provide a basis not only for the transformation of people in the course of changing circumstances but also for productive activity which really is based upon communal needs and communal purposes.

On the side of production, there is a substantial expansion of new state companies, the introduction of co-management in basic industry beginning in the state aluminum firm ALCASA and the creation of a new institution — the *Empresas de Produccion Social* (EPS). The concept of these new companies of social production is that they both make a commitment to serving community needs and also incorporate worker management. Drawn from a number of sources — existing cooperatives (now committing themselves to the community rather than only collective self-interest), smaller state enterprises and private firms anxious to obtain access to state business and favourable credit terms), the logic of the EPS is to reorient productive activity away from exchange value to use-value — by linking to the community and to the state sector as part of production chains as suppliers and processors. The goal, in short, is to move progressively away from the separation of the collective worker inherent in commodity production to a concept of solidarity within the society.

When you look at this picture, you understand better Chavez's statement at the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre about the need to 're-invent socialism,' the need to develop new systems that are 'built on cooperation, not competition.' Capitalism, he stressed, has to be transcended if we are ever going to end the poverty of the majority of the world. 'But we cannot resort to state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the Soviet Union. We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything.'

Which way Venezuela?

It should be apparent from the premises with which we began that only in Venezuela is there at this time a real challenge to capitalism (as opposed to fostering survival strategies and negotiating new terms in the implicit contract with capital). But, is Venezuela succeeding? Certainly, there is an attempt to understand the logic of capital, the effort to attack capitalism ideologically in a battle of ideas and development of the conception of an alternative to capitalism. But, what about the actual creation of that alternative?

In *Build it Now: Socialism for the 21st Century*, a book which will be published next month, I wrote the following about the Bolivarian Revolution:

“The economic revolution, in short, has begun in Venezuela but the political revolution (which began dramatically with the new constitution but requires the transformation of the state into one in which power comes from below) and the cultural revolution (which calls for a serious

assault on the continuing patterns of corruption and clientalism) lag well behind. Without advances in these two other sides, the Bolivarian Revolution cannot help but be deformed.”

While the Bolivarian Revolution has definitely succeeded in providing enormous hope and dignity for the poor, it faces many problems and its success will only occur as the result of struggle. Not only a struggle against US imperialism, the champion of barbarism around the world, which is threatened by any suggestion that there is an alternative to its rule. And, not only against the domestic oligarchy with its capitalist enclaves in the mass media, banks, processing sectors and the latifundia. Those are struggles for which the Revolution must be prepared and for which solidarity with that revolution is essential. But, the really difficult struggle, I suggest, is within the Bolivarian Revolution itself.

Many problems have their origin in one question: who are the subjects of this revolution? It is clear who have been the principal beneficiaries — the poor (and especially women) and, thus, its most passionate supporters. Yet, the further development of the revolution requires that not only the needs of people but also their transformative activity drive the revolutionary process.

In this respect, the creation of the communal councils is an absolutely critical step in this process because it creates the space for the self-development of revolutionary subjects. At the same time, however, worker management in what are called ‘strategic’ state industries has moved backward, and these reversals have demoralised revolutionary workers; confining them to the adversarial role that they play in capitalism, it reinforces all the self-oriented tendencies of the old society. Without democratic, participatory and protagonistic production, people remain the fragmented, crippled human beings that capitalism produces. Further, if state firms remain characterised by hierarchical decision-making, how long before producers in the companies of social production (EPS) articulated in production chains with them discover that they are themselves little more than associations of collective wage-labourers? Where, then, is the social economy as an alternative to capitalism?

There are, in short, significant contradictions within the Bolivarian Revolution at this time. For some Chavists who want Chavez without socialism, the process has gone far enough. To the extent, then, that there is resistance to decision-making from below (whether in workplaces or communities), the self-development of people will advance only through struggle. But, there is at this point no means of coordinating among organised workers, cooperative members, informal sector workers, peasants and professionals who are prepared to fight for protagonistic democracy in the workplace and in the community; there is no united force from below demanding transparency and prepared to fight against corruption and the deformation of the Revolution.

To carry the Bolivarian Revolution forward and to demonstrate the possibility for that ‘new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything,’ it is essential to create institutions that foster the development and coordination of revolutionary subjects — people who transform themselves in the course of struggling for a better world. As Hugo Chávez wrote from prison in 1993, ‘the sovereign people must transform itself into the object and the subject of power. This option is not negotiable for revolutionaries.’

** This essay was originally prepared for a presentation at the IVth International Meeting of the Solidary Economy at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil 21-23 July 2006. It was organized by NESOL which conducts research and activities related to economic alternatives.*

Socialism for the 21st Century: A Trade Unionist View

by Jean-Pierre Daubois

Jean-Pierre Daubois is long time union activist and socialist who began to work on the production line at the General Motors assembly plant in Ste Therese, Quebec in 1977. Later he became an electrician and ultimately became president of the skilled trades at the facility. He worked there until the plant closed in 2002 and then became one of the main leaders of the impressive, but ultimately unsuccessful, mobilization to keep the facility open. Two years ago he travelled to Venezuela to learn more directly about Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution; he has followed events closely since. When Greg Wilpert, the respected editor of Venezuela Analysis wrote an article on 'The Meaning of 21st Century Socialism for Venezuela', Jean-Pierre was moved to write the following response. Socialist Project reprints it here as part of the international discussions on the evolution of Venezuela as well as questions about our own labour movement in Canada.

Dear Mr. Wilpert,

I loved your article 'Socialism for the 21st Century'. It is well balanced and points out the incredible achievements of the Chavez government, and also some of the dangers which are coming as much from the inside as from the outside. It is most important to discuss the internal dangers; the future of the Bolivarian movement needs this very much.

I have been to Venezuela and witnessed the dangers of the personalization of the revolution around Chavez. Although I am convinced he does not want that, the weight of the political tradition of *caudillismo* in the culture is strong in Venezuela as well as in Latin America in general. Associated with this, as you point out, are the dangers of the bureaucratization of the revolution and the creation of a sort of *nomenclatura* — which again Chavez clearly does not want.

I am working class myself, and have been working in industry here in Canada for almost 30 years (at General Motors). I raise this because I want to expand on what you have perceived as one of the dangers for the revolution — the political immaturity of the working class, which is sadly illustrated by the recent collapse of the UNT convention.

It is not so simple to develop worker controlled industries. Workers have to understand that even if they are freed from bosses pushing them around and pressuring them for productivity, they still have to develop quality and productivity in a socialized economy. It is not clear today in Venezuela if workers are fully aware and prepared to address such issues.

A very good friend of mine is from Chile. He is a political refugee who has been in Canada since 1973. We worked at GM together for almost 27 years and of course he, like all of us, went

through the numerous restructurings, rationalizations, down-sizing, and other corporate niceties until our plant was closed in 2002. Through these years my friend lived the craziness of our capitalist system.

Two years ago he left for Venezuela and worked there — not as an intellectual, but as a worker. He was working in small companies, but still he got a sense of the attitudes of Venezuelan workers toward work and productivity. It was a shock to him; he was surprised by the low motivation and low productivity of workers.

The other interesting thing he told me came from conversations he had with a Cuban doctor living near his house in a working class area. He had made friends with this doctor and they chatted quite a bit. One day he asked him: “What do you think of the people of Venezuela?” The doctor had this interesting answer: “Chavez is giving them too much too fast — healthcare, education... it all comes without a fight.”

I found that interesting because one of the dangers that you discuss in your article is that of people becoming dependent on authority — the benevolent authority that will solve their problems. This is a passive attitude. I understand that Chavez tries to overcome this situation, but it is there. It is an inheritance from the past, when the old parties handed down favours here and there. It is one thing to condemn such practices; it is something else to extirpate it from people’s conscience. The comment of the Cuban doctor strikes at the heart of the internal political challenges: how to bring about a nation which will take charge of itself without a benevolent state/leader to “take care of it for you”. That is the greatest challenge for socialism for the 21st century.

Allow me to make a parallel here. For a long time, I was an elected union rep and participated in bargaining. The union’s strategy in negotiations with the Big Three automakers is pattern bargaining, which means targeting the company least inclined to accept a strike and then concentrating on it to establish the pattern collective agreement. That pattern would then be imposed on the other companies. It worked wonders for decades. Workers did enjoy a steady increase in their standard of living: better pay, more holidays, more vacations, better insurance coverage, better benefits in general, better working conditions, etc. And the pattern bargaining strategy allowed it to happen practically without conflict and/or strike. I started in the industry in 1977, and I had a 3-day strike in 1978, 1 week in 1982, 3 weeks in 1996, and that’s it.

The consequence (unforeseen probably) was that workers take it all for granted. They think that it is “their absolute right” and that corporations “owe it to them”; that the company is only paying them what they are worth; and that the union does not have much of influence on all that. Basically, what they get is NORMAL and of course MINIMAL, even though as auto workers they earned much more than any other sector of the working class.

In an atmosphere of such complacency, and with a total misunderstanding of how gains really do come about, what do you think happened when GM announced the plant closure? Do you think workers rebelled against the corporation which was about to deprive them of their jobs? No way! The rebellion was against the union, which was supposed to have the power to prevent that (though how you have power without mobilization is unclear). It was the union for not having

prevented the closure that failed them. Not the corporation, not globalization, not capitalism and its rules — the union failed them. In other words, the workers had been handed down great gains by a very smart and dedicated union, but the same workers did not understand the first thing about capitalism and why they were “winning” for a time, and then why they were suddenly on the chopping block in that globalized, capitalist economic system.

I know that comparing a union issue in classic bargaining with the Bolivarian revolution seems out of place, but the mechanism of not having to build, piece by piece, your own social conquests and having a benevolent leadership getting it for you is similar. It leads to an attitude of passivity and complacency, and those attitudes are present in Venezuela’s working class now.

Chavez, by crafting this catchy phrase “socialism for the 21st century” has made clear that he wants to develop something different from Eastern-European, state-run socialism. Chavez has left the debate on “socialism for the 21st century” to his people, and debate they have over this, at length.

NOTE: I do not put Cuba in the same category as Eastern Europe. Cuba was and is under constant political and economic boycott and sabotage, and under permanent military menace since day one. Cuba has to protect its advances under enormous pressure and that reality has created some “rigidity” in its political system. But Cuba has nothing to do with the state-run socialism of the former Soviet Union. In Cuba, the revolution did manage to maintain a strong credibility with the people. If they hadn’t maintained complete credibility, they would not have survived after the collapse of the Soviet Union; it is as simple as that.

I think that one of the most original things about Chavez is that he wants his people to evolve and to reach toward socialism. He is willing to push in that direction, but ultimately he wishes for the people to have the political maturity to strive for it by themselves, and most importantly to TAKE responsibility for it, too.

In other words, Chavez puts challenges to his people. He points to the “star” to attain, and challenges them to attain it by their organization, conscience and will. That’s very rare in politics — forcing your partisans to think about their own attitude and challenging them to act both on society and on themselves, too.

In several articles by Michael Lebowitz on the debate over co-management and the traps to avoid in implementing it (i.e. bureaucracy, top-down decisions, workers not taking charge) you could read about some of the internal limitations the revolution is suffering right now. You are right in your article about the internal contradictions. I would only add that workers have not yet developed the maturity for taking charge and that Chavez, I think, is fully aware of this. He is trying to push them, to challenge them. Clearly Venezuela has decades of underdeveloped, corrupted, lazy, grab-from-the-till mentality to overcome. Your article is helping to put the problem on the table. Chavez has time ... for now. The US is bogged down in Iraq; if they were not, they certainly would have undertaken more serious action against Venezuela. This conjuncture allows for a Chavez to develop a project for a different world and for Morales as well to develop his project in Bolivia, but it is only a question of time before more aggression is mounted. In that sense they have to develop their revolutions faster rather than slower.

The future of mankind is at stake here, and I am not trying to be dramatic or to say that Chavez is THE saviour. I am telling you that it is only circumstantial that the US is not attacking with more aggressiveness. We — socialists — need to put before the eyes of the world an example of socialism that cannot be associated with the state-run model of Eastern Europe. That model did not inspire anybody in the working class; that model did not make anybody dream that ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE. The experience of the Bolivarian Revolution has the potential to generate such dreams in the conscience of millions and millions, and at this point in history we need that desperately, NOW more than later in the century. It is in that sense that the Bolivarian revolution is crucial NOW.

If you remember the invasion of the island of Grenada during Reagan's time, or the Allende experience in Chile, both were democratically elected socialists who were overthrown. Why? Of the many reasons, one clearly is that the US cannot allow socialism to be seen as a democratic alternative. Socialism MUST, for the US, be associated with the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe.

Talking specifically about Grenada, how this island of 100,000 inhabitants was a threat to US is simple: it was a democratically-elected socialist government that could inspire the poor of the entire continent, and that is not to be allowed by the US. If they invaded Grenada to prevent it from becoming an inspiration, imagine how pissed they are that Chavez is still alive and well...

The Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe were not attractive — this is an understatement — for the working class of the developed countries. The Bolivarian revolution, with the ALBA and all of it, has such potential that it is a most dangerous enemy for the US. This is why I do not hesitate to say that the Venezuela experience is crucial for mankind. It must succeed, and time is not entirely on their side. This is why I am concerned with the collapse of the UNT convention. How come the core of the Venezuelan working class can't organize? What kind of message is this for the enemies? How come the UNT crumbles under bitter infighting, when all of the five tendencies are each claiming to be more Chavista than the others? My thirty years' experience in a trade union tells me that this is a sign that the focus of the tendencies is directed toward an internal power struggle more than toward differentiating themselves by their actual accomplishments in the daily struggle of the working class. That is a sign of an organization that lacks solid roots even if they have big numbers on paper.

It seems that "politicking" and bureaucratic manoeuvring is taking charge instead of politics, and that is a bad sign; a sign of political immaturity, a sign that the working class still has to overcome the legacy of the old political system. The leaders of the five factions of the UNT shall, if they are genuine Bolivarians, realize that while they are allowing themselves to commit to infighting, Big Brother is watching...

*In solidarity,
Jean-Pierre Daubois*

Socialist Voice #120, August 24, 2006

Hugo Chavez: 'The Future Is Yours, Go and Construct It'

by Coral Wynter & Jim McIlroy, Caracas

(Green Left Weekly, August 2, 2006) Around 10,000 people rallied in the Poliedro amphitheatre on June 29 to celebrate the third anniversary of the founding of the Frente Francisco de Miranda. The FFM is the leading organisation mobilising youth in support of the revolutionary process in Venezuela being led by the nation's socialist President Hugo Chavez.

Erika Farias, national director of the FFM and recently appointed government minister in charge of Venezuela's food program, described to the gathering the work of the FFM in helping to organise the social missions that are addressing the needs of the poor majority in the areas of education, health, food distribution, support for prisoners and assistance to the homeless.

Farias also described the new role of the FFM in monitoring the micro-banks linked to the new community councils, as well as the responsibility given to the FFM in assisting Mission Identity — the process of ensuring the great majority of the population is registered to vote in the December 3 presidential elections.

Chavez also addressed the gathering, telling the cheering and chanting audience of young FFM members that “The most important thing [right now] is to celebrate the third anniversary of our sons and daughters of the revolution, fighting in a progressive way ... It is three years since that day we went with [Cuban President] Fidel [Castro] to one of the first courses to see the [Cuban Youth] Pioneers ... I imagine the voice of the oligarchy saying we are ‘using the children’, but they don't think young people have the capacity to think or to take a position.”

Chavez described FFM members as “social fighters” who are all “leaders of this country” and stressed that “the ideological battle against destructive capitalism, for socialism, must deepen. Only socialism will save the planet, will save the human species ... We must develop consciousness.”

Chavez explained that “the FFM began as an idea three years ago, a product of imperialist aggression and the [April 2002] coup, named after one of the greatest men in our history” — Venezuelan revolutionary from the late 18th and early 19th century Francisco de Miranda. Chavez said Miranda wrote to the youth that “the path of revolution is hard, is painful, is difficult. That advice was good. He was fighting for the independence [of the continent]. But his ideas serve to inspire us today; his ideas conform to the central nucleus of our struggle for socialism of the 21st century.

“In 2003 and 2004, eight courses [attended by Frente members] were completed in Havana. I need to congratulate you, who left friends, family, daily life, to go to Cuba, to become social fighters for the FFM. Around 36,000 men and women went to Cuba to attend these courses. [Since then] the FFM has assisted with developing the first missions. There have been some internal conflicts, but this is all part of the process of maturing.

“Now you are doing tasks in different missions, involving different institutions, transforming them. Because the old state — bureaucratic and corrupt — sought to benefit the old oligarchy, and repress and exclude the majority.”

Chavez said there has been an “internal process of confrontation, but we are still very far from the state of justice that we need to consolidate and deepen the revolution”.

“The continuation of this transformation of the state is a giant task, involving the creation of new institutions. And the FFM [through working to construct the social missions] has demonstrated with increasing ability that it is possible to have institutions that are transparent, efficient, that fulfill their tasks, and that fight against corruption.”

A new generation Chavez recalled the “marvellous youth of the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s. The [rulers] tried to rob us of our future. The generation that I belong to, and the generation that preceded me, were the generation that were beaten up badly. They robbed us all.

“These generations were collectively inoculated by an anti-social vaccine. My generation was not politically conscious. You are a new generation, new blood; you represent a new offensive of the youth — and true revolutionaries. I will be with you always. When you are much older, we will have a country that is truly free, a socialist republic. We have hardly started, hardly opened the path, because we are always being threatened.”

Che Guevara is “one of the greatest examples” of someone “whose spirit lives in the hearts of the youth of this continent”, Chavez said. “Today, we must adapt Che’s [example]. The revolutionary youth must be a vanguard of all the movements. There should not be one movement that does not incorporate the Frente, together with the popular organisations, as the vanguard; the first who are ready to make the sacrifices that the revolution demands; the first in work; the first at study; the first to the defence of the country.

“For example, if imperialist North America dares to invade our country, the 25,000 youth of the FFM would go out with arms. The Frente should assume your tasks in defence of the country. The first Russian rifles [of 100,000 recently purchased] are arriving, and these guns are being distributed to the army, the marines, the air force, and also to the National Guard and certain territorial forces. As soon as we can, the forces in the frontline — the Frente — will be distributed rifles.

“Che said that the vanguard is the first to do the work. But it has more to do with ideology. Each of you assumes the job of constructing a new socialism. You are doing great things with voluntary work. You don’t make a revolution without voluntary work. Your solidarity work is not based on exploitation, but on liberation from the yoke of work, from social control, under capitalism.”

Chavez argued that socialism must become “more concrete”, not just a “better state in the future”. “No, socialism must be constructed every day, in concrete spaces, with people of blood and bones. In only three years of existence, the FFM has created a world record. You have achieved and consolidated growth — 36,000 [went through the training], 21,000 remain [involved]. Today, 15,000 are active — a great troop.

“We are now in the second stage of formation [of the FFM]. [This year] more than 5000 new members came [to the training course in Cuba]. And we have another 5000 attending a different school in August. The FFM have expanded and consolidated in revolutionary consciousness and in efficiency. The Frente has consolidated throughout the country, there is now no state that does not have an FFM presence.”

Battle for socialism Chavez called for a “battle to create socialism in the economic sphere. There can be no socialism without transforming the economy. Socialism involves a great deal of humanism. Socialism includes the politics and the economics; together they form a whole. Equality must be established and practised in Venezuela. It has everything to do with inclusion.

“The social missions became the instruments of constructing socialism. But they are not socialism itself. They are weapons in the construction of socialism, aimed to include everybody, to establish and to practice equality ... But socialism in the economy is also something specific. We must transform the structures of the capitalist model. We are running out of time, because the model of control of capital reproduces itself; it is a virus that reappears and expands. And here in Venezuela, the capitalist system was deeply implanted, not only in the reality, but sadly in the minds of the great majority of Venezuelans.

“In this battle of ideas, the opinion polls reflect the [advances made]. When Venezuelan people were asked whether they preferred capitalism or socialism, 10-15 years ago you wouldn’t get 10% [for socialism]. Now the polls show that from last year, 40-50% of Venezuelans say they would prefer socialism. This is a great step forward in the ideological battle. But for socialism to exist in reality, there is a long way to go. Nevertheless, it is perfectly clear that those who prefer socialism are committed and active. This is a great advance ...

“The Frente can now begin to move into the economic sphere, into the economic production units that are born with a socialist, rather than capitalist, character ... [such as] the endogenous production units [production aimed at national economic development]. We need to develop new technical skills, and study mixed with work.”

Chavez urged the FFM to “also incorporate itself into the international struggle. We are in a new stage internationally, and in Latin America. We express our solidarity with Palestine, with Africa.

“The FFM has arrived to stay. The Frente is converting itself into a vanguard of the Bolivarian socialist revolution. The FFM has written itself into the pages of the history of Venezuela. The future is yours, go and construct it. Long live the Frente! Long live the Bolivarian revolution! Long live revolution in Latin America! Venceremos! [We will win!]”

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Cuba Condemns Israel's Aggression

Statement From The Ministry Of Foreign Affairs

(Havana, August 3, 2006) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba expresses its most energetic condemnation of the cowardly, vile and criminal attack perpetrated on the Lebanese town of Qana by the Israeli government on July 30, 2006, in which at least 60 civilians were killed, including 34 children, 15 of them with physical and mental disabilities.

This barbarous act of state terrorism is part of the war of aggression unleashed by Israel on the Lebanon 23 days ago, which has already resulted in at least 900 civilians dead, more than 3,243 injured – one third of them children — more than one million displaced persons and which is causing enormous suffering to the defenseless population subjected to an ironclad aerial, naval and land blockade.

The aggressor has carried out thousands of air attacks, has dropped thousands of bombs on that little territory and has targeted civilian population concentrations in the cities of Beirut, Tyre, Baalbeck, Tripoli (north Beirut) and the Valley of Bekaa. The Palestinian refugee camps of Burch Al Barachne and Rashidieh were also attacked. Israeli land forces have intensified their actions.

Israel has bombarded electricity stations; food, dairy and textile plants; television and communication towers and transmitters; the road infrastructure including almost all bridges; radar installations; the principal Lebanese ports, fuel tanks and reserves; and Beirut international airport.

It would seem that UN observers were deliberately attacked despite that organization's many warnings.

The United States guarantees Israel official aid of \$2.7 billion per annum, of that total more than \$1.6 billion in military hardware, and a further \$1.5 billion in supposedly private funds. The combat planes and helicopters; aviation fuel; bombs, including the devastating GBU-28s; the missiles; the laser protection systems; satellites; armored tanks and land armaments with which this genocide is being committed, are all supplied by the United States.

With the use of its veto, the U.S. government has prevented any action by the Security Council. Its public and criminal opposition to the demand for a ceasefire has aborted other peace initiatives.

With rare exceptions, the European Union has served as an accomplice and has accepted the bland statements imposed by the Empire on the other side of the Atlantic.

During these terrible days, the hypocritical and shameless policy of those who are cooperating and still maintaining a silence over the kidnapping in other countries, secret transfer and torture of detainees, has been literally laid bare. They are the same ones who are now trampling over

international law, international humanitarian law and participating in the crime with their silence or omission.

The responsibility for the immune continuation of this savage aggression against the Lebanese civilian population, which constitutes an act of state terrorism, lies with the country that economically and militarily sustains the aggressor and those that act as servile vassals and accomplices.

Cuba is demanding an immediate cessation of this aggression and calls on the international community to mobilize in order to impose an immediate and unconditional ceasefire on the aggressor. The continuing destruction of a little country day after day and the massacre of its civilian population cannot be tolerated.

At this crucial time, Cuba reaffirms its total solidarity with the Lebanese people who, together with the heroic Palestinians and all the Arab peoples, are once again suffering the aggression of the Tel Aviv regime