

Contents

- 269. New Pamphlets on Indigenous Struggles, Palestinian Rights
 - 270. Venezuela: Nationalizations Aim to Make Industry Serve Peoples' Needs.
Federico Fuentes
 - 271. Why Washington Hates Iran.
Barry Sheppard
 - 272. Cuba Supporters in Canada Launch Hurricane Relief Fund.
Robert Johnson, Keith Ellis
 - 273. The Nomination of Barack Obama: Two Socialist Views.
Malik Miah, Barry Sheppard
 - 274. Canada's Election and the Climate Crisis: Five Parties, No Solutions.
Ian Angus
 - 275. Bolivia's Indigenous Government Defies US-backed Fascists.
Federico Fuentes
 - 276. NDP or Bloc? Quebec left debates election tactics.
Richard Fidler
-

Socialist Voice #269, September 1, 2008

New Pamphlets on Indigenous Struggles, Palestinian Rights

Socialist Voice is pleased to announce two new pamphlets offering Marxist perspectives on critical issues in the world today.

For the Land! Roots and Revolutionary Dynamics of Indigenous Struggles in Canada
by Mike Krebs

For decades, the most pointed struggles, the ones that have electrified Indigenous people across Canada, have been assertions of rights over their lands. Mike Krebs analyses the history, present reality, and direction of the fight of Indigenous people in Canada for justice and self-determination.

Anti-Semitism, Zionism, and the Defense of Palestinian Rights
By Suzanne Weiss

A new edition, updated and expanded, of one of Socialist Voice's most widely read pamphlets. Examines the causes of anti-Semitism, the horror of the Holocaust, and the need for solidarity between Jewish and Moslem activists to defend the Palestinians and oppose Zionism.

These pamphlets are available now in two formats:

1. PROFESSIONALLY PRINTED COPIES can be purchased by mail from South Branch Publications. Download and print the Order Form from the Socialist Voice Publications Page.

2. FREE PDF COPIES can be downloaded from the Socialist Voice Publications Page.

Socialist Voice #270, September 3, 2008

Venezuela: Nationalizations Aim to Make Industry Serve Peoples' Needs

By Federico Fuentes

On August 27, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez announced the end of negotiations with former owner Ternium over the nationalization of the Sidor steel factory, stating that the government would “take over all the companies that it has here,” and that Ternium “can leave.”

Speaking during a televised broadcast, Chávez explained that Ternium “did not recognize our sovereignty.”

“The deadline for reaching an agreement has expired. We will move ahead and pay them what it really costs. Moreover, it will not be all in one go as they wanted. No, we will pay them at a pace that is appropriate for us.”

Until the April 9 decision to nationalize Sidor, the Ternium consortium, whose biggest shareholder is the Italian-Argentine transnational Techint, had 60% control of one of the largest steel factories in Latin America, located in the industrial state of Bolívar.

Chávez stated in his August 27 broadcast that a tentative agreement on the purchase price, reached the previous week, had broken down when Ternium tried to impose unacceptable conditions. Among the transnational’s demands was a law giving it immunity from any future lawsuits related to abuses committed by Ternium against the Sidor workforce.

The decision to nationalize Sidor came after a 15-month-long dispute between the workers and the transnational over a collective contract. Having intervened in order to help reach a resolution, Venezuelan Vice-President Ramon Carrizalez declared that negotiations with Sidor’s management were no longer possible, due to its “colonizer attitude” and “barbarous exploitation.”

“This is a government that protects workers and will never take the side of a transnational company,” Carrizalez said.

Nationalization push

During the August 27 broadcast, Chávez stood alongside business owners from the cement industry, with whom the government has also been negotiating since the April 3 announcement that it plans to nationalize the three largest cement companies, which control 90% of the sector.

The government had reached agreements to buy out the majority of shares from the French company, Lafarge, and the Swiss company, Holcim, but negotiations had stalled with the largest company, the Mexican-owned Cemex.

On August 18, after the negotiation period expired, the government announced that it would expropriate Cemex, and ordered the takeover of its installations.

By law, there is a 60 days period starting from the declaration of intent to expropriate during which the two parties can reach an agreement. Cemex is asking for US\$1.3 billion, but the government has stated it will not pay more than \$650 million.

However, Chávez said that, in contrast to the record with Ternium, there were positive signs that an agreement could be reached.

Chávez also used the broadcast to explain a new law, approved in the first round of discussion by the National Assembly, that will put the distribution of fuel back into government hands. The state oil company PDVSA will supply fuel directly to the 60% of the country's service stations that are privately owned (many by small proprietors), eliminating the capitalist intermediaries who now sell to them for a profit.

Negotiations will now begin with the seven largest companies, including Texaco and BP and 650 other firms that currently finance a majority of private service stations.

Energy minister Rafael Ramírez also announced that the government was looking at similar measures regarding the distribution of Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders.

Last month, Chávez announced plans to nationalize Spanish-owned Banco de Venezuela, an action that will almost double the state's control of the financial sector from its previous 10%.

Reversing neoliberalism

Together with the announcements made earlier this year to take control of more than 30% of milk production and food distribution, and last year's decision to take majority control of the oilfields in the Orinoco Belt, these moves are part of a second wave of nationalizations, focused on industries related to production.

The first wave, begun at the start of 2007, was directed at telecommunications and electricity, to guarantee all Venezuelans access to basic services.

The August 25 edition of the Caracas daily *El Universal* reported that since last year 11 industries have passed over into state hands.

While pro-capitalist governments privatized a number of important industries during the 1990s (including Sidor, part of the electrical sector and telecommunications company CANTV), they always had their eyes set on the big prize, PDVSA. Chávez's election in 1998 halted such privatization plans. Since then the government, backed by the majority of the population, has worked towards rolling back neoliberalism.

Unsurprisingly, the first major showdown was a result of government attempts to gain full control over the nominally state-owned PDVSA. Fierce resistance by the parasitic capitalist class, accustomed to leeching off the rent produced by PDVSA, led to a military coup that briefly overthrew Chávez in April 2002 followed by a shutdown of the oil industry by the pro-capitalist management in December 2002.

Both attempts by the capitalist class to bring down Chávez were carried out in alliance with the corrupt trade union bureaucracy of the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers (CTV).

During more than two months of intense struggle caused by the shutdown, oil workers, working alongside poor communities and the armed forces, reopened PDVSA and restarted it under workers' control.

This victory was crucial in ensuring that the government could begin to redirect PDVSA's profits away from the capitalists and towards funding the social missions that provide, among other things, free health care and education. The missions also helped organize the Chavista grassroots supporters.

Publicly declaring in January 2005 that he had become convinced that his project for national liberation and the eradication of poverty could not be achieved within the bounds of capitalism, Chávez argued for the need to move towards a "new socialism of the 21st century."

That same month, he announced the nationalization of the Venepal paper company, whose workers had been fighting to reopen it after the bosses shut down operations in December 2002. Renamed Invepal, the company was handed over to the workers as a joint state-worker cooperative. Since then, a number of other smaller companies that had been shut down and then taken-over by their workers have been nationalized.

However, the nationalizations initiated in 2007 marked a qualitative leap in the process of state recuperation of control over strategic sectors.

State planning

These nationalizations have been carried out in accordance with the government's overall economic plan, which seeks state control over strategic industries in order to direct production towards the needs of the Venezuelan nation.

Now under state control, the three cement companies will be merged into the new National Cement Corporation and will integrate its production plans with PDVSA and Sidor — focusing on infrastructure development, creating new industrial centres and pushing forward the government's badly needed housing construction plans.

The Steel Corporation of Venezuela is also being created — it will manage the whole steel production chain that is now 80% under state control, from primary material to finished products. Production will be directed towards the needs of small and medium companies, the oil industry and the housing sector.

And while no specific public statements have been made, it seems likely that the nationalization of Banco de Venezuela will lead to reorganization of the public banking sector into a single national public bank.

The new Public Administration Law, decreed on July 29 as part of the package of 26 laws issued by Chávez, states that where various state companies exist they should be grouped into one. This can include companies in different industrial sectors that, due to their nature, work together.

With the recent nationalizations, the number of workers in the state sector will increase by 41,400, totalling just over two million according to the National Institute of Statistics. This does

not include those in the fuel distribution and LPG cylinder distribution sectors, which are slated to come under state control.

This represents a 53.5% increase in the number of public sector workers in the last nine years. Importantly, Chávez has raised the need to eradicate the practice of contracting out labour in the state sector, which will further increase this number.

In the same period, employment in the (formal and informal) private sector grew from 7.3 million to 9.4 million.

Worker and community participation

Almost none of the recent nationalizations are the direct result of workers' struggle in favour of such measures, although in many cases labour disputes were factors. This was the case with fuel distribution, where unions have been warning that the bosses were trying to manufacture shortages and provoke strikes to undermine the government.

In contrast to most of the earlier nationalizations involving small factories, only in Sidor can it be said that the demand for nationalization came from the workers. Even then, the demand was raised only in the last period of the struggle after persistent campaigning by a small nucleus of Sidor workers.

Yet, the future of the nationalized companies depends on the political and organizational capacity of the working class in running these industries, and the working class currently finds itself in a state of dispersion and fragmentation.

Unofficially, according to the daily newspaper *Ultimas Noticias* (April 27), there are no fewer than 3,600 unions in Venezuela.

This fragmentation is due to numerous factors, but two in particular stand out. Firstly, with the coming to power of Chávez and the expansion of workers' rights and union freedom, workplaces across the country experienced an explosion of union organizing.

In the aftermath of the defeat of the bosses' lockout, a majority of the pro-revolution unions came behind the formation of the National Union of Workers (UNT), which rapidly overtook the CTV as the largest union confederation. However, the UNT is plagued by bitter internal disputes. This division deepened earlier this year when two currents left the UNT to form a new union confederation.

Added to this are negative experiences in some cooperative-run factories, including the exploitation of contract labour and self-enrichment by co-op owners.

Secondly, actions by sections of the government and state bureaucracy have also worked against the self-organization of workers and their participation in running state industries. Under the previous labour minister, José Ramón Rivero (who actively worked against the Sidor workers), parallel unionism was promoted in order to favour the union current from which he came and to dampen labour disputes.

In PDVSA and the state electrical company, workers have faced attacks at the hands of a bureaucracy that is afraid of losing power if workers take on a greater role in management.

The recent nationalizations have coincided with the launch of the “April 13 Mission.” Chávez has stated that part of the mission’s aim is to transfer control over services to organized communities through communal councils and communes and the creation of productive units and factories that will be socially owned and run.

Without the participation of workers and organized communities in the running of industries and in democratic planning, control of state companies will remain in the hands of bureaucrats who are more interested in maintaining their share of power and privileges. This would restrict the ability of workers to fully develop their creative potential, boxing them into their role as simple providers of labour power.

This has created situations like the one in the nationalized Inveval valve factory, run under workers’ management. It has the capacity to produce valves for PDVSA, but it has been pushed aside by PDVSA bureaucrats who prefer to continue their contracts with private companies.

Significantly, it was reported on August 28 that Inveval will become a mixed company, jointly owned with PDVSA, and will directly supply the state oil company with valves.

A crisis threatens the electrical sector, where, despite repeated warnings by the workers, power generation and distribution plans have failed to take into consideration increased demand caused by the boom in industrial and housing projects.

Speaking on the eve of this year’s May Day demonstrations, Chávez once again repeated his call for the working class to take the lead in the struggle for socialism. “There is no revolution without the workers, and I would add, there is no socialism without the working class,” he insisted.

“That is why the working class that the revolution needs has to be very conscious, very united,” he said.

“The Bolivarian revolution ... needs to be ‘proletarianized’ ... the ideology of the proletariat should dominate in all spheres, a transformational, truly revolutionary ideology, and overcome petty bourgeois currents that always end up being ... counter-revolutionary.”

Federico Fuentes is a Green Left Weekly correspondent based in Caracas, Venezuela.

Socialist Voice #271, September 7, 2008

Why Washington Hates Iran

The following is the Introduction to Why Washington Hates Iran: A Political Memoir of the Revolution That Shook the Middle East, a Socialist Voice pamphlet published this week by South Branch Publications. The author, Barry Sheppard, was a member of the US Socialist Workers Party for 28 years, and a central leader of the party for most of that time.

In 2005, Resistance Books published the first volume of his political memoir, The Party: The Socialist Workers Party 1960-1988. The new pamphlet is a chapter from the second volume, now in preparation.

Why Washington Hates Iran can be downloaded for free from the Socialist Voice website.

By Barry Sheppard

The United States and its client garrison state of Israel are openly saber-rattling against Iran. The immediate issue is Iran's nuclear program. Both Washington and Tel Aviv have stated that it would be "unacceptable" for Iran to develop the capacity to make nuclear weapons, and threaten a pre-emptive military strike possibly including atomic weapons.

Iran states its nuclear program is for peaceful uses only. But even if Iran wants to have a future capacity to develop its own bomb, the U.S. and Israeli stance is patently hypocritical, as both are armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons. They seek to preserve Israel's status as the sole nuclear power in the Middle East. However, more is involved. Washington seeks to turn back Iran's growing influence in the region resulting from the failed U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Widening the war to include Iran and possibly Pakistan, however irrational it would be, could be a desperate gamble for the U.S. to somehow pull its chestnuts out of the fire.

If there is such an attack, the Iranian people will unite to oppose it. Iran has many cards to play. Its armed forces are stronger than Iraq's were before the U.S. invasion. It has middle-range missiles. It has important influence with its ally, Syria, and armed sympathizers in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine Partisans of Iran are capable of waging irregular warfare ("terrorism" in Washington's jargon) against U.S. interests throughout the world. The recent escalation of tensions between Washington and Moscow has redrawn the map of international relations and thrown a monkey wrench into any plans to attack Iran. As of this writing cooler heads are prevailing in the U.S. administration, but this could rapidly change in the current unstable situation.

The confrontation with Iran is the latest manifestation of the hostility the U.S. has maintained against that country for three decades, since the 1979 Revolution. A central thrust of that Revolution was the overthrow of U.S. imperialism's direct control of Iran through its proxy regime of the Shah. This anti-imperialist aspect of the Revolution was very deep and survives to

this day, which explains why any attack on Iran will be met with a mobilization of the Iranian people.

This pamphlet consists of a chapter which will appear in the second volume of a political memoir of my time as a central leader of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party and earlier of its youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance. It tells the story of the first year of the Revolution from the prism of my involvement in it. I was in Tehran during the February 1979 insurrection, and returned twice. It isn't a history of that year, and it doesn't cover the development of Iran in the following years and decades. Other chapters of my book will include information on the years 1980-1988 in Iran, including the violent suppression of the left and the U.S.-backed Iraqi war against Iran.

My companion Caroline Lund and I were living in Paris in 1979. We were part of the leadership team of the Trotskyist Fourth International, representing the Socialist Workers Party. I was assigned to go to Iran early in 1979, and Caroline went back to New York while I was in Iran. That is how I happened to be there during the insurrection.

I agree with the editors of *Socialist Voice* that publication of this chapter at this time, before the book is published, will help explain U.S. hostility toward Iran and the anti-imperialism of the Iranian people as a background to the present crisis.

The chapter also, I believe, sheds light on the contradictions of the Revolution, contradictions which persist to the present day. Many on the left internationally have a one-sided view of the Iranian Revolution, and tend to dismiss it because of the capitalist Islamic clerical regime that emerged from it. It is beyond the scope of this pamphlet to describe present-day Iranian reality, but the contradictions between the capitalist regime and the demands of the workers, peasants, women and oppressed nationalities continue, with the regime being forced to make concessions while at the same time continuing repression to maintain its rule.

Iran's response to the imperialist threats suffers from the fact that it is governed by a capitalist regime, beset by corruption and conflict within its leadership, while the workers movement in the country is not politically independent although it has waged some militant struggles for better wages and living conditions.

Another aspect of this chapter is the heroic role that was played by Iranian revolutionists, in spite of the small size of their organizations, in the cauldron of the Revolution. They got it right. They were intransigent supporters and defenders of the Revolution unlike many Iranian leftists who turned against it in face of the repression of the new capitalist regime. At the same time, as they formed the Iranian Socialist Workers Party, they retained their independence and intransigent defense of the workers, peasants, women and oppressed nationalities — the backbone of the Revolution.

Socialist Voice #272, September 14, 2008

Cuba Supporters in Canada Launch Hurricane Relief Fund

Introduction by Robert Johnson

Cuba has been assaulted in quick succession by three powerful hurricanes. Gustav, Hanna, and Ike left a trail of massive destruction, the worst that Cuba has experienced in more than four decades. This was a cruel blow to the Cuban people, who have set an example to the world of selfless generosity despite their limited material resources. Under the leadership of their workers and farmers government, Cubans have now set to work to repair the damage.

Canadian government aid to Cuba in this time of crisis is minuscule. The Canadian media, which has reported extensively on hurricane damage in Louisiana and Texas, has been all but silent on the devastation in Cuba.

In face of this inaction and silence, it is important for supporters of the Cuba revolution to act effectively. The Canadian Network on Cuba has issued an appeal for funds to help them in their reconstruction effort; the initial goal is to raise \$100,000 as soon as possible. The CNC has issued a public appeal for funds, which we reproduce below.

The appeal is signed by Keith Ellis, an emeritus professor of the University of Toronto and an honorary member of the Union of Artists and Writers of Cuba. Dr. Ellis is the chair of the CNC's Cuba Hurricane Fund Committee.

The Canadian Network on Cuba <cnc@canadiannetworkoncuba.ca>, coordinates the work of organizations in solidarity with Cuba across the country: local groups, trade unions and political organizations. Its counterpart in Quebec is the Table de concertation de solidarité Québec-Cuba <www.solidaritequebeccuba.qc.ca>.

The CNC's fund appeal was issued on September 2, before hurricane Ike compounded the devastation wrought by Gustav and Hanna. Although the winds of Ike were not as strong as those of Gustav, the later hurricane travelled across the entire island from east to west, drenching it with massive amounts of rain. In areas previously struck by Gustav, Ike toppled structures that had been weakened by its predecessor. Preparing for Ike, Cuba's civil defense system organized the evacuation of 2.5 million people, more than 20% of the population, from high-risk areas. Despite these efforts the storm caused the death of seven people.

A September 11 report by the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina updates some of the information contained in the CNC's appeal, taking into account the effects of hurricanes Hanna and Ike. It says that the path of destruction stretches for more than a thousand kilometres across the island. In some areas of the country the scenes resemble those of an earthquake: sealed-off roads, houses demolished into scattered brick and dust, some flooded; electrical cables and towers toppled; plantations devastated.

At least 30,000 families have lost their homes; another 320,000 homes have suffered serious damage.

Agriculture has been severely affected. Preliminary reports indicate “colossal losses” in the production of bananas, corn (maize), sugar cane, coffee, yucca, guava, avocados and poultry. In the provinces of Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo 300,000 tons of coffee have been destroyed.

According to Prensa Latina, initial estimates by international agencies are that Cuba’s losses could total more than three billion dollars. This imposes an enormous burden on the country’s economy.

Socialist Voice urges its readers to distribute the following appeal as widely as possible and to contribute generously to the fund.

Canadian Network on Cuba

2 September, 2008

Dear Friends,

As you already know, Cuba has suffered the fierce attacks of a hurricane. This one, Gustav, is considered to be the most devastating in the last forty years. Having caused severe flooding in its early stages in eastern Cuba, it grew in strength and size in the warm Caribbean waters and, after demolishing the special municipality of the Isle of Youth with its awful force, invaded Pinar del Río, Cuba’s most westerly province. By this time it had achieved a diameter of some 450 kilometers with the most destructive winds and rains packed into the eastern side of the monster. Although Pinar del Río bore the brunt of the damage, ravaged by sustained winds of 240 kph, with gusts as high as 350 kph, the area of damage extended to include the provinces of Havana, City of Havana and Matanzas.

The damage touched all sectors of the economic and social life of the region. In large parts of Pinar del Río and Isla de la Juventud, houses, schools, hospitals and other public buildings that weren’t demolished, lost their roofs or suffered other kinds of damage. This means that warehouses that stored supplies and commodities such as rice, sugar, flour, tobacco, could not avoid exposing them to the elements. Cultural and recreational facilities were damaged or destroyed. Ferris wheels were turned into mangled metal, as were transmission towers used for electricity or communications. Damaged high-tension power lines, roads and bridges added to the toll. The agricultural sector has suffered severely. Hundreds of hectares of bananas fell early, as did citrus fruit. Sugar cane was massively affected, and sophisticated irrigation equipment was ruined. The part of the fishing industry based in the Isla de la Juventud was gravely hurt.

The good news is that – thanks to the precautionary measures, in which Cuba leads the world and which involved moving a quarter of a million people to safe shelter – not a single life was lost. Five lobster fishermen who were missing at sea for a time were found after an intensive air and sea search. However, regrettably four were lost in accidents during Hurricane Ike.

Cuba, like other Caribbean countries and parts of the United States, occupies a geographical space that is in the path of hurricanes. This space is now more prone than ever to disastrous hurricanes as a result of climate change. Hardly has Gustav passed than Hanna and Ike appeared on the weather map like a caravan of doom. That Cuba should be a victim of this increased frequency is a striking injustice, since Cuba is the country least to be blamed for the deteriorating climatic conditions that fuel hurricanes. Let us remember that when the World Wildlife Fund in 2006 evaluated countries throughout the world to determine how they ranked with regard to sustainable development, based on economic and human development and protection of the environment, they found that Cuba was the only country that met the criteria.

Hurricanes will continue to batter Cuba. The island can frustrate them only to a certain extent, chiefly through deepening scientific knowledge of their behaviour and the achievement of a social organization based on solidarity, trust, egalitarianism and fairness. The day after Gustav passed, roads were being cleared and swept, food was being shipped to affected areas from provinces that were better supplied, linemen were arriving in Pinar del Río from Santiago to work “as long as is necessary,” and public health brigades were ensuring salutary conditions. Building materials were being distributed to those who needed repairs to their homes. The energy revolution has introduced technologies that have resulted in speeding up the restoration of electricity after damage to the grid. The presidents of the Defense Councils of Pinar del Río and Isla de la Juventud, both women, are being received in the various communities they visit, with cheerful demonstrations of confidence in them and in the Revolution. A badly damaged hospital in one of the communities in Pinar del Río was the place of birth of a boy during the hurricane. He was named Gustavo for the hurricane and David for the Cuban people’s spirit of fighting against great odds.

That fighting spirit must also be imbued with the patience of Sisyphus, because the unwanted meteorological phenomenon stubbornly recurs. A previous CNC donation went precisely to one of the again affected Pinar del Río communities to provide roofs for some 200 houses. We hope that these roofs have survived. The fighting spirit must also be buttressed by financial resources.

At this time of writing, two days after the disaster, the total cost of the damage has not yet been assessed, but it will surely be billions of dollars. Even though Cuba has not requested aid from us, the friends of Cuba, led by the constituent members of the Canadian Network on Cuba, will want, as they usually do, to do everything possible to help. In view of the great expense, we should imaginatively seek out new additional sources of funds—from different levels of government, farmer’s associations, trade unions, cultural groups—and in general widen the circle of the friends of Cuba. We should work to include people who are indignant at injustice, those who understand, for example, that one of the main reasons why the Bush administration let some of its citizens die rather than accept Cuban medical help at the time of Katrina was because they wanted no easing of their brutal embargo, even when Cuba was faced with terrible natural disasters. Let us approach Canadians with some of the information included in this piece and, as José Martí would do, believing in their goodness.

The need for funds to recover from hurricanes Gustav and Ike is urgent. We aim to forward to Cuba an initial contribution of \$100,000 as soon as possible. We hope that in this hour of Cuba's need, you will find it possible to respond in a spirit that reflects our respect and appreciation of the generosity and determination of the Cuban people.

One hundred per cent of your donation will go to Cuba either directly or in shipping requested materials to help in the reconstruction. There are two ways to send in donations. The charitable organization "Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund", registered Canadian charitable organization #88876 9197, is working with us to collect donations for Cuba Hurricane Relief. Either way, you will receive a charitable tax receipt:

1) Send your cheque made payable to the "Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund", clearly stating "For Cuba Hurricane Relief" on the memo line, together with your name, address and telephone number if it is not already on your cheque so a tax receipt can be issued and sent to you (or state that a tax receipt is not needed).

Envelopes should be addressed to [address deleted]

If you do not want a tax receipt, you can go directly to any TD Canada Trust branch and deposit money in the following bank account: [Banking info deleted]

2) Make out your cheque to your local Cuba solidarity committee. Include your name, address and phone number, clearly stating "For Cuba Hurricane Relief". The local committee will send one cheque together with a list of the names, addresses, phone numbers and the amount of the donation of the individual donors to the Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund (Registered charitable organization # 88876 9197). Tax receipts will then be sent to individual donors.

3) If you wish, you can go directly to the Oxfam Canada website, <http://www.oxfam.ca/>. Click on Hurricane Relief and send in a donation specifying, if you wish, in the comment section that the donation go to Cuba. You will automatically and immediately receive a tax deductible receipt.

Yours in solidarity,

Keith Ellis,
Chair, Cuba Hurricane Fund Committee,
Canadian Network on Cuba

Socialist Voice #273, September 15, 2008

The Nomination of Barack Obama: Two Socialist Views

Introduction. The authors of these articles are both long-time revolutionary socialists in the United States. Malik Miah is a trade union activist at United Airlines, and a supporter of the US socialist group Solidarity. Barry Sheppard is the author of the new Socialist Voice pamphlet, Why Washington Hates Iran.

The Elephant in the Room: Obama, The Left and the Race Question

By Malik Miah

(From Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal. This article was written before the Democratic and Republican Party conventions.)

Much of the world is fascinated by the current US presidential election. The main reason is that the United States is ready to do something that most developed countries would never consider doing: electing a representative from an oppressed minority as head of state.

Could Australia ever elect an Aborigine as prime minister? An Australian of Asian descent? Could Germany ever elect a German-born Turk as chancellor? What about a black as head of state in the United Kingdom or France? Yet we in the United States are discussing the real possibility that a man with a father from Africa, representing a community of descendants of former slaves, could actually be elected president of the most powerful country in human history.

So it is not a surprise that Barack Obama's skin colour and bi-racial origins are a subtle and not-so-subtle issue in the presidential race. During the Democratic Party primaries, for example, Hillary Clinton and the former president Bill Clinton and their supporters made references to the "fact" that Obama could not appeal to enough "blue-collar workers" — meaning white working-class Americans in the main — to defeat the Republican nominee (Bill Clinton is still very upset that some in the Black community thought he was playing the "race card" to help get his wife nominated. He hasn't met with Obama yet.)

Now the expected Republican nominee, John McCain, is playing the same dirty race card to undermine support for Obama — the likely Democratic Party nominee. The most infamous ad involved the two young white female personalities (Brittney Spears and Paris Hilton) and Obama. There is a long history of race-baiting politics using the fear of a Black man with white women in US society.

Race matters

Can the United States overcome its history of racial prejudice to elect the first Black president?

Race is the elephant in the room. But few will openly acknowledge its role in this unprecedented presidential race. Code words are used by the media to avoid the issue of racism and race prejudice.

Yet the fact is the Democratic Party expects to win big in the House of Representatives and Senate races because of the very low approval rating of the Republicans, especially President George W. Bush (some 20%) and his diabolical vice-president, Dick Cheney (even less).

But the polls show the presidential race too close to call. McCain is in a statistical dead heat with Obama.

There is only one reason for this: Obama's skin colour. The Republican attack machine led by former Bush aides is running negative ads that tell angry white voters upset by high gas prices, fewer jobs and a dark future that Obama can't be trusted.

While it is true that the racism and racial prejudice of most whites is at historic low levels, there is no doubt that the 23% of whites who openly state they will never vote for a Black can turn the 2008 elections to the Republican nominee. The Republicans know that several "swing states" are in play and race can make the difference.

(The US presidential election is not won by a national popular vote. It is based on who wins the most *electoral* votes, which are calculated state by state. In 2000 Al Gore won the popular vote but lost the electoral college vote to Bush.)

What's striking is that the Republicans have been able to attack Obama by playing the "race card," then blame Obama for explaining how the race card will be used by the Republicans. Obama has repeatedly explained that his opponents will raise the fear of him to divert discussion of the issues of war and the economy because he doesn't look like previous presidents on US currency.

The media falls for the lie as it did four years earlier when the same tactic was used to smear ("Swift boat") Democrat John Kerry over his military record during the Vietnam War. Worse, the pundits have all accepted the false concept of "blue-collar workers" being only white workers, leaving out Black, Latino and Asian workers.

Obama's campaign has played its hand too carefully on the race-baiting issue. The campaign has a strategic fear that any mention of race will agitate the "fear factor" among whites and may lead them to vote for the "safe" white candidate.

Race matters because racism is institutionalised throughout US society. The fact that an African American (bi-racial but Black, because skin colour is what defines you) could be elected to the most powerful office in the world is not a concern to the ruling class. It knows Obama will defend its interests.

But that truth is not enough to be elected. Political power has been in the hands of white men so long that a change of power won't happen without a fight.

Many mainstream, journalists are now beginning to openly discuss this elephant in the campaign. EJ Dionne Jr., of the *Washington Post*, observed, “There is no doubt that two keys to this election are: How many white and Latino votes will Obama lose because of his race than a white Democrat would have won? And how much will African American turnout grow, given the opportunity to elect our nation’s first Black president?”

(Dionne notes that in 1960, when John F. Kennedy ran and won as the “first Catholic president”, his religion was an issue and he won 80% of the Catholic vote — about 30% greater than the Catholic share won four years earlier.)

Obama is fully aware of this history. It’s why he is shifting on issues like affirmative action and talking more about “class” as the basis for qualifications to enter higher education and other positions. The fact is skin colour is always a factor even for wealthier, more educated Blacks. Study after study shows — and proves — that when equally qualified whites and Blacks apply for jobs, nine times out of ten, whites will get the job first. Affirmative action is necessary to level the playing field and to ensure equal opportunity. (Obama has told white audiences his two daughters won’t need it to appeal to their false belief that there is such a thing as “Black skin privilege.”)

The problem for Obama and his supporters is the blatantly racist campaigns of the past (Richard Nixon’s infamous 1968 “Southern strategy” to get poor whites to change parties) are no longer viable. Today the campaigns are more subtle as the Spears-Hilton ad showed — and they tend to work.

The Republican attack machine uses “fear” of the Black man and Obama’s alleged “elitism” (he attended Columbia University in New York and Harvard Law School) as wedge issues for white workers looking for an excuse to vote against a Black candidate.

McCain’s charge that Obama is not qualified to be commander in chief is a red herring. So is the charge of elitism — Obama’s upbringing by a single white mother and a distant father is similar to what most working-class whites face.

The “fear the Black man” machine is not just aimed at working-class whites, but at Latinos and Asians too. It is noteworthy that two-thirds of Latinos are polling for Obama, who they see as closer to their concerns, especially on the issue of immigration. The Asian community is more divided but a majority still favour the Democrats and Obama.

Some 40 years after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., now a national hero, and the fall of legal segregation, it is amazing that a Black man may be elected president.

If the Republican attack machine succeeds in turning the election into the “white guy versus the Black man” the outcome of the election could change with many anti-racists voting for Obama to express opposition to the race baiting of the Republican campaign.

There is no way today to predict what will happen in November. In the late 1960s after the victories of the civil rights movement that led to some important legal changes in law, the first

Black candidates for higher office (big city mayors) faced vicious racial attacks. Whenever those elections were nominally labeled “non-partisan” many on the socialist left backed those candidacies as a rejection of racism and to support to the right of the Black community to have elected political representation. They knew that these candidates still identified themselves as Democrats.

The 2008 presidential election has some similarities. The difference of course is that Obama doesn't pretend to be independent. He isn't running against the old guard of his party. He is campaigning as a “centrist” new Democrat, as seen in his positions on major issues — from energy, the economy, health care and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

World tour in this context

Obama's quickly organised and highly publicised international trip in July, in this context, was to show the world and the United States (his main audience) that he is “presidential”. What he said was mainstream and in line with the shift in US imperial policy that began under former president Bill Clinton and accelerated under Bush.

Obama's trip to the Middle East was not a repudiation of Bush-Cheney policies but an argument that the Democrats have a better strategic plan to protect Israel and defend US interests. Obama supports US domination of the Arab world. He advocates a more aggressive war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (He even told his staff and reporters not to wear “green” while in Israel and Jordan because it symbolises Hamas!)

Obama also told the media that he sees generals as tacticians carrying out the president's orders. Obama, like Bush, will pick generals who support or accept his policies.

When Obama spoke to hundreds of thousands of Germans in Berlin, he focused on the responsibility of the world (“I'm a citizen of the world,” he said) to defend the “free world” from terrorism.

While much of the left sees Obama as shifting positions on Iraq by proposing a long-term withdrawal, he strongly advocates a new “surge” into Afghanistan. He is also for a more aggressive policy toward Pakistan.

Obama simply believes he's smarter than the Bush team and thus more capable of defending US interests while he rebuilds alliances with “Old Europe” and rising Asian powers.

Obama's domestic programs are centre-right too. The “yes you” rhetoric taps the real desire for a change of leadership. While he will support some liberal positions on women's rights and civil rights, his healthcare program is modest and does not guarantee healthcare as a right.

On energy policy he first opposed any new off-shore drilling. But as the Republican attack machine pushed back hard, he shifted his stance to allow it if “part of a comprehensive energy plan.”

The differences with McCain are sharper on social issues like affirmative action and abortion rights. But even on these issues he is fudging more and more to appeal to religious conservatives and white blue-collar workers. In the fine traditions of Bill Clinton, Obama is saying what his audiences of white, gun-carrying Americans want to hear.

The shift to the "centre" assumes that minorities, particularly African Americans, will turn out in big numbers and vote for him anyway. It is likely that Blacks will do so because of the historic nature of electing a Black president. But for other groups, it's not so clear. Obama will need a big turnout to overcome the white fear factor backlash.

Two contradictory realities

While socialists recognise that lesser-evil politics can never free workers, including white workers, from capitalist exploitation and domination, the issue of race could be decisive if the Republicans are successful in turning the election into a referendum vote for or against the candidate best able to protect whites. Under those circumstances, it may be justifiable to cast a vote against McCain's race baiting. I say this knowing that most socialists and those in favour of an independent working-class party will vote for the independent Ralph Nader or the Green Party presidential candidate Cynthia McKinney.

The contradiction of the Obama phenomenon is that it reflects two realities. One is the possibility that the world's sole superpower is okay with having a Black man as its president.

Second, is the polarisation and legacy of racism in the United States. The reality is the ruling class may be okay but the politicians seeking the job are not ready to give up their privileges and power.

For socialists the issue of Obama (the unique figure and capitalist politician) is conflicted. On the one hand, there is no doubt that backing a candidate of the most powerful military industrial complex in the world is impossible.

On the other hand, the issue of race and racism poses the question: Is the election of Obama as the first Black president a way to push back racist ideology as it was in the 1960s-70s when the first "independent" Black candidates for big city mayors were elected did?

I'm of two minds. As a socialist I will either vote for Nader or McKinney to advance the need for class independence.

But as a supporter of nationalism of the oppressed, I'm inclined to vote against the de facto race-baiting campaign of McCain and elect the first Black president.

During the great American Civil War in the 1860s, Marx and Engels wholeheartedly supported the North against the South. They urged their followers to join the Union Army and help bring about the defeat of the slave owners. Marx and Engels had no illusions of what that meant for capitalist development and consolidation. But the smashing of the slave labour system and development of a modern-day US capitalism was in their view in the long-term interests of the working class.

A new body blow to racist ideology by electing a Black man as president isn't on that order of significance for many reasons. But it would send a message that citizenship and rights should not be based on the false construct called "race" or the shade of your skin.

Obama Raises Hopes But Pledges More War

By Barry Sheppard

(From Direct Action)

The nomination of Barack Obama as the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party is historic. He is the first African American presidential candidate of one of the two major capitalist parties. He may win the election and become the first black president, something inconceivable only two years ago. That a black man might become head of government in a society still marked by ingrained racism puts race at the centre of the election campaign — more on this below.

Obama gave his acceptance speech at the end of the Democratic Party convention to some 84,000 people. Such a turnout for a presidential candidate is itself unprecedented. During the Democratic Party primary campaign Obama regularly spoke to audiences of thousands. He has raised hopes in a nation weary of war and which is in a worsening economic downturn hitting workers and the middle class hard.

At the same time Obama is the candidate of a capitalist, imperialist party. If he is elected, he will carry out policies in the interests of the US capitalist class. One front will be foreign policy, the central question of which is what the US rulers will do about their military debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama has taken on the mantle of the anti-war candidate. He has promised to bring home the troops from Iraq in 16 months after he takes office, that is, by May 2010.

This was basically the proposal put forward by the Baker-Hamilton commission at the end of 2006. Congress had set up the Iraq Study Group with James Baker, the Republican co-chair with the Democrat Lee Hamilton. Baker was a leading figure in the Reagan and Bush senior administrations. The whole Study Group was composed of "blue ribbon" ruling-class politicians. Their proposal was to begin to bring the troops away from combat, slowly, and gradually redeploy them in bases in Iraq, Kuwait, and other neighbouring countries, ready to again intervene if necessary.

Bush rejected this proposal in favour of "staying the course" with a troop increase — the "surge". This has put stress on the troops, many of whom were forced into doing two, three or four stints in Iraq. But the "surge" has failed to achieve President George Bush's stated goal of stabilising a pro-US regime in Iraq that can stand on its own with minimal US military support.

The Baker-Hamilton proposal, while not openly saying so, recognised that the US occupation is a political failure. It proposed a way to largely extricate the US military from Iraq while minimising the international repercussions of this defeat. Obama echoes the Study Group, tacitly accepting the fact that Iraq will be left in shambles. The US-led invasion has destroyed Iraq,

whose citizens in their increasing majority want the foreign troops to leave and let them begin to rebuild their country. Under this pressure, the puppet government of Iraqi PM Nuri al-Maliki is demanding a timetable for US withdrawal in negotiations for a new pact with Washington to allow its troops to stay in Iraq. Malcolm X said that “when the puppet talks back to the puppeteer, the puppeteer’s in trouble.”

The Bush administration has indicated that it may have to agree to a timetable, something which it said it would never agree to. Obama was thus able to say in his speech that even the Iraqi PM and Bush have come over, leaving Republican candidate John McCain high and dry sticking to the “stay the course” refrain. But Obama, in his speech, also said that he would increase the number of US troops in Afghanistan, that the mistake was to occupy Iraq instead of “securing” Afghanistan. Afghanistan is becoming another quagmire for the US. Sending more troops there will repeat the Iraq debacle.

Obama also promises to increase the size of the armed forces, another indication of the direction his administration will take if he is elected. He reiterated his unswerving support to Israel. Historically, the Democrats have been even more implacable in their backing of the garrison Zionist state than the Republicans.

Obama also said that he will confront Russian “aggression,” meaning Moscow’s resistance to NATO encirclement. While it was not in his acceptance speech, Obama charges that the Bush administration has not countered the Venezuelan “threat” in Latin America. He wants to regain US dominance in the region, although his plans on how to do that are unclear.

Concerning Iran, Obama positions himself as more inclined to diplomacy than Bush and McCain. He would negotiate with Iran, but with “nothing off the table” — meaning the threat of invasion or the use of nuclear weapons. But whichever of the two major candidates become president, he will inherit Washington’s Iranian debacle.

Another indicator of the direction of foreign policy under Obama is his selection of Senator Joseph Biden as his vice-presidential candidate. Biden is billed as an “old hand” on foreign policy, which means he is in the mould of Bill Clinton. It was under Clinton that the failed attack on Somalia occurred, and the 12 years of sanctions and bombing of Iraq were imposed. Another person on Obama’s team is Clinton’s secretary of state, Madeline Albright, who, when asked in 1996 about the 500,000 Iraqi children who died as a result of the sanctions, said “It’s worth it.”

The US is in a recession as far as working people are concerned. Unemployment is up. Real wages are down. Millions of families are facing foreclosure on their homes. Ten million homes have mortgages that are higher than what the homes can be sold for, and prices continue to drop. The price of gasoline has jumped over two times in as many years. Home heating oil is up, which means increased hardship for millions this winter. No-one knows how deep the credit crisis will go. All loans are becoming more expensive and harder to get. Some banks have failed already and more will follow suit.

What does Obama propose? In his speech he said “I will set a clear goal as president: In ten years we will finally end our dependence on oil from the Middle East”. (The US actually imports far more oil from Canada, Mexico and Venezuela than it does from the Middle East.) He said he will tap natural gas resources, invest in “clean coal” and “safe” nuclear power. He pledged to spend US\$150 billion in the next decade on solar, wind and biofuels.

He says he will cut taxes for 95% of working people, while scrapping the tax cut for the rich Bush pushed through. He promised health care for all. But his proposal rests on keeping health insurance in the hands of private companies, the problem in the US healthcare system in the first place. He is opposed to government-provided “single payer” health insurance for all.

Obama referred to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his speech. But he is staying clear of proposing any programs and reforms of the type FDR was compelled to implement during the 1930’s Great Depression and labour radicalization. Obama has no plan to help families facing home foreclosures. He is silent on the burning need to launch a massive public works program to rebuild the nation’s crumbling infrastructure and provide work for the unemployed. He is against raising the minimum wage to where it was in 1970 — \$10 an hour in today’s dollars — from the present \$6.25.

Such programs are well within the boundaries of capitalism. In fact they would strengthen the system. But the capitalist class is opposed for ideological reasons to anything that smacks of social intervention and responsibilities, fearing the spectre of socialism.

The race question, front and centre

The fact that an African American may become president places the race question front and centre in the election campaign. It indicates a change in attitudes among many whites, a move away from racism. It is a reflection of the great shift the victory of the civil rights movement of the 1960s caused. Nevertheless racism among many whites remains.

In a year when nearly 80% of the population believes the country is headed in the wrong direction, and the Bush Republican administration is greatly discredited, with Democrats set to win more local, state and congressional elections, polls show McCain and Obama in a dead heat. This cannot be explained by differences in the personalities of the two — if anything, Obama is far more capable, is a much better speaker, and so forth. The only explanation is racism. The fact is, a great many whites will simply never vote for a black, even if they agree with him or her.

Racism is the elephant in the room. Few openly acknowledge its role in this unprecedented presidential election. Code words are used by the media to avoid the issue. And innuendo, not crude racism, has been used to appeal to prejudice, and will become intensified for the rest of the campaign. Bill and Hillary Clinton used such subtle appeals during the Democratic primaries. Hillary Clinton even said that Obama couldn’t win the votes “of workers, white workers”.

McCain ran an advertisement ostensibly to ridicule Obama as a celebrity by counterposing a picture of him with pictures of Brittany Spears and Paris Hilton, two blondes. The real message was to appeal to deep sexual fears many white men have of black men with white women.

Another subtle ploy is the assertion that Obama is a Muslim, circulated by Republican operatives. Something like 10% of US voters believe the charge. The appeal is not only to prejudice against Muslims that is rampant in the US, but to the fact that most Muslims in the world are coloured. On some internet sites the race hatred against Obama is vicious and open, including calls for his assassination. McCain stays silent.

Obama's acceptance speech was a sharp attack on Bush and McCain. The theme of "change" which has been his signature was concretized into one simple idea: reject the past eight years of the Bush administration and its continuance under McCain. This theme is very popular, especially among young people of all colours, and a great number of whites.

Obama's nomination is seen by 95% of African Americans as a historic step forward for them. The election, for most blacks, is a referendum on race. Obama has raised hopes not only that the past eight years will be overcome, but that the war in Iraq will be ended and people of colour will step into a place in the sun. If he wins, his administration will fail to fulfill those hopes. Whether this will lead to demoralisation among his followers, or anger that leads to a new period of mass action, remains to be seen.

Socialist Voice #274, September 21, 2008.

Canada's Election and the Climate Crisis: Five Parties, No Solutions

By Ian Angus

For the environment, there's good news and bad news in Canada's current federal election campaign. Good news: for the first time ever, climate change is a central issue in the political debates. Bad news: despite much sound and fury, none of the major political parties is proposing effective measures for dealing with the climate change crisis. The differences between them amount to "*Don't do anything*" versus "*Don't do much.*"

When Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party took office in January 2006, they promptly cancelled existing environmental programs and planned to ignore the environment from then on. Only a massive public opinion shift led them to awkwardly don green garb in 2007 and announce a new "Turning the Corner Plan" on greenhouse gases.

There wasn't much to the plan — a detailed review by the respected Tyndall Institute concluded that greenhouse gas emissions over the coming decade would be the same, and might be lower, if the Conservative plan didn't exist at all. The Tories' close alliance with the Bush administration and its drive to block any international agreement on emissions targets shows just how misleading their green rhetoric was.

Now, with a recession looming, the Conservatives are fighting this election as the "party of free enterprise, free markets and free trade" — which means returning to their previous anti-environmental positions. Harper demagogically promises to defend economic growth, while charging that the Liberals "jeopardize our economic growth with new taxes and threaten to impose new trade barriers in their Green Shift Plan."

Harper signalled his new direction most clearly by promising a 50% reduction in federal taxes on diesel and aviation fuel. That's a \$600 million fossil fuel subsidy to industries that generate 10% of Canada's greenhouse gases. If the Conservatives are re-elected, no one should be surprised if they use "economic growth" to justify backtracking even on the feeble environmental measures they introduced in the past 18 months.

The opposition

Polls show that the environment and climate change still rank very high as voter concerns, so the Tory policy shift offers an opportunity for the opposition parties to mobilize that concern in support of a strong pro-environment program. Unfortunately, none of them proposes effective measures for dealing with the crisis. The "solutions" they offer amount to little more than crossing their fingers and hoping that the problem will go away.

All four mainstream opposition parties — Liberals, New Democrats, Bloc Québécois and Greens — have embraced the currently trendy economic theory that the way to fight global warming is

to “put a price on carbon.” Corporations and consumers emit greenhouse gases, the theory says, because doing so doesn’t cost them anything. If government imposes a cost, companies and individuals will seek alternatives — they will try to reduce or eliminate their emissions in order to reduce their costs.

The Liberal Party is the prime defender of this approach. The cornerstone of its election program is the “Green Shift Plan,” which they say will “shift Canada’s tax system away from income and towards pollution.” They promise to phase in a \$40 per tonne tax on greenhouse gas emissions over four years, and to reduce corporate and personal income taxes by an equivalent amount. As a result, businesses will be “encouraged to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases they emit into the atmosphere,” while consumers will be motivated to insulate their homes and find other ways to make less use of fossil fuels.

The Liberals say they will begin the tax shift immediately. They also promise an emissions trading scheme for corporations, including caps on emissions — but say it “will take several years to build.”

The New Democratic Party argues, correctly, that the main effect of the Liberal tax plan will be higher prices for working people. Instead, the NDP wants to launch a cap-and-trade program quickly. They have provided few details about their program, but they have made positive statements about the Western Climate Initiative, under which several provinces and U.S. states propose to regulate emissions while allowing corporations to continue polluting by purchasing emissions credits from the government, other corporations or Third World countries.

The NDP website says its plan is “in line with” a similar scheme implemented in Europe. It is silent on the fact that the European system has produced windfall profits for energy companies while having no effect at all on emissions.

The Green Party and Bloc Québécois propose variants on the two main themes. The Greens want a cap-and-trade program for large corporations, combined with a shift from income taxes to carbon taxes for consumers. The Bloc favours cap-and-trade, organized on a province-by-province basis.

Will market solutions work?

There is much more than this to each party’s program, and each party promises a different set of reforms and subsidies. But underneath those variations in style and detail, the opposition parties are united in seeking to use capitalist methods to solve a problem that is inherent in capitalism. “Putting a price on carbon” — directly through taxes or indirectly through a cap-and-trade scheme — means depending on the magic of the market to reduce emissions.

At best, that’s wishful thinking.

Consumers can only make significant emissions cuts if affordable low-emission alternatives are actually available, which they are not. In practice, the main effect of pricing carbon (directly through a tax or indirectly through emissions trading and regulations) will be to increase the

prices of essential products for which there are no alternatives — especially food, transportation and housing. Workers and farmers, already hit by declining real incomes, will have to tighten their belts until those magical new products arrive, if they ever do.

As for corporate polluters, it's hard to believe that anyone who follows the business news can still claim that markets and "price signals" are an efficient way to get good results. Yet such claims are still made: *Hot Air*, a recent book co-written by two leading Canadian economists who favour putting a price on carbon, offers a typical justification:

"Using market-based policies is the best way of accomplishing this objective, because taxes and emissions trading schemes send the same financial signals to all firms and individuals, encouraging them to seek the lowest-cost actions that lead in turn to lower overall costs for society."

Two points need to be stressed.

First, to these economists, "lower overall costs for society" doesn't mean fewer droughts, floods and giant storms, less damage to crops, or fewer climate refugees and climate-related catastrophes. It only means lower spending by capitalists. For them, the cheapest solution is the "most efficient," even if it increases human misery.

Second, and more important, the economists' unstated assumption is that the "lowest-cost actions" will reduce emissions. But real-world experience shows that long before they change their business methods, corporations will opt for a very different set of "lowest-cost actions," including:

- *Lobbying and economic blackmail.* Whoever wins the election will be subject to intense pressure from the major emitters, demanding special treatment, arguing for delays and exemptions, and threatening layoffs and shutdowns if their interests aren't given priority. Past experience says they'll succeed in watering down legislation, if they don't block it completely.
- *Cheating and lying.* A recent study found that the methods used by Canadian and U.S. oil refineries to calculate greenhouse gas emissions dramatically understate what's really happening. Actual measurement at an Alberta refinery found that it released 19 times more benzene, 15 times more hydrocarbons, and nine times more methane, than it reported to Environment Canada. The oil industry's response? Rather than changing its emissions measurement procedures, it demanded that the government suppress the tables showing the dramatic difference between reported and actual emissions.

The plans proposed by Canadian political parties all rely on self-reporting by the polluters, for whom lying is often the lowest-cost option. Even if they are caught, investigations, trials and appeals can win them years of delays.

- *Cutting wages.* The tried and tested corporate method of dealing with higher costs is to shift the burden onto workers, directly through pay cuts and longer hours, or indirectly by outsourcing work to countries where wages are lower.
- *Gaming the system.* Every corporation employs teams of lawyers and accountants to figure out how to get around regulations and avoid paying taxes. These scam artists are undoubtedly already working on legal ways to minimize the impact of any emissions policy — without actually reducing emissions, of course.
- *Passing the costs on to consumers.* If the increased costs imposed by carbon taxes or trading can't be evaded, corporations will increase prices. The only barrier to such increases is competition, and the biggest polluters have very few competitors.
- *Shifting investments elsewhere.* Capitalists don't just need profits — they need a *rate of profit* that matches or exceeds the rate they can make elsewhere. If the carbon rules cut into their profits, they will move their money elsewhere, to other industries or other countries. If that happens, just watch how fast the politicians back down!

In short, big industry will do everything in its power to block or minimize any restrictions on business-as-usual — and they will do their utmost to avoid or delay complying with laws that do get passed. Pro-capitalist economic models never take those factors into account.

But that isn't the biggest problem with the programs of the opposition parties.

Even if their programs are implemented exactly as proposed, and even if there is 100% compliance, and even if the regulations and “price signals” produce the promised results, emissions will not come down fast enough to head off dangerous climate changes.

The most aggressive “put a price on carbon” plan proposed in the influential book *Hot Air* will, the authors say, reduce emissions to 50% below the 2010 level, by 2050. That's far less than what's needed — but none of these programs is nearly that aggressive.

Declare a climate emergency!

The starting point for any serious effort to combat climate change must be recognition that this is an *emergency*. The world's leading climate scientist, James Hansen, head of NASA's Goddard Institute, says that unless decisive action is taken quickly, “it will become impractical to constrain atmospheric carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas produced in burning fossil fuels, to a level that prevents the climate system from passing tipping points that lead to disastrous climate changes that spiral dynamically out of humanity's control.”

A growing number of climate scientists believe that the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has already passed the safe level. Modest targets such as reducing emissions to 25%-40% below 1990 levels by 2020 are not just inadequate — they are, Hansen says, “a recipe for global disaster.”

A government that really wanted to deal with climate change would declare a Climate Emergency. It would learn from the experience of World War II, when Ottawa forced through a radical transformation of the entire economy in a few months, with no lost jobs or pay cuts.

Internationally, it would campaign for a tough global climate treaty with teeth, focusing on cutting rich industrial nations' emissions and transferring clean technology to the Global South.

Regardless of what happens in international negotiations, Canada must unilaterally adopt a goal of a 60% overall emissions reduction by 2020, and a 90% reduction by 2030. Those reductions can be achieved through government measures such as these:

- Set hard, rapidly declining ceilings on emissions produced by the largest companies. Expropriate any company that doesn't comply.
- Put all power industries under public ownership and democratic control. Begin phasing out coal-fired plants immediately and stop building new ones. Invest heavily in non-fossil fuel sources such as solar, wind, tidal and geothermal.
- Stop all new development in the Tar Sands and rapidly phase out existing operations, including restoring of the land as closely as possible to its previous condition.
- Redirect all military spending and the federal budget surplus into public energy-saving projects such as expanding mass transit and retrofitting homes and office buildings. Former tar sands workers and redeployed soldiers can play key roles in this effort.
- Retool auto plants to focus on building mass transit, wind turbines and other green technologies.
- Expand and upgrade transit systems so that all urban residents can use them easily. Make all public transit free.

The climate crisis will not respond to modest goals and incremental tinkering — what's needed are emergency measures to drive current greenhouse gas emissions towards zero as rapidly as possible. Unfortunately, in this election, modest goals and incremental tinkering are the best that Canadian politicians are offering. There is no sign that any party recognizes how serious the problem actually is, let alone that emergency action is needed.

Ian Angus is Editor of Climate and Capitalism and an Associate Editor of Socialist Voice.

Socialist Voice #275, September 22, 2008

Bolivia's Indigenous Government Defies US-backed Fascists

By Federico Fuentes

Relative calm has returned to Bolivia following a three-week offensive of violence and terrorism launched by the US-backed right-wing opposition denounced by Bolivian President Evo Morales as a "civil coup."

This campaign of terror, based in the four resource-rich eastern departments (Santa Cruz, Pando, Beni and Tarija) known as the media luna (Half Moon), was initiated following a national referendum in which Morales's presidency was endorsed by 67.4% of the vote – greater than the almost 54% that voted for him in 2005 and with a higher voter turnout.

The violence was an attempt to impose by force what was lost at the ballot box.

Violently assaulting civilians, police officer and soldiers, occupying and burning public buildings, blowing up gas pipelines, and blockading roads were among the tactics of the pro-neoliberal forces of the opposition, which used fascist shock troops of racist armed youth gangs, such as the Santa Cruz Youth Union (UJC).

The worst violence occurred on September 11, with the massacre in Pando of unarmed indigenous campesinos, including children and pregnant women, who were marching against the racist violence. At least 30 people were slaughtered, and more than 100 are still missing. It was carried out by paramilitaries created and controlled by Pando governor Leopoldo Fernandez, since arrested for the atrocity.

However, the anger and mobilizations of the social movements, the Morales government's decision to introduce martial law in Pando and restore order, together with the historic September 15 meeting of all South American presidents under the auspices of the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) to pass a unanimous motion in defence of Bolivia's legitimate government, dealt the opposition a significant blow, putting them on the back foot.

With the opposition returning to the negotiation table, the government and the social movements that support it have clearly come out stronger in this latest round of the ongoing battle over Bolivia's future.

The right-wing opposition, based in the Half Moon prefects and "civic committees" as well as the opposition Chuquisaca prefect, has been forced to temporarily retreat. The fascists' roadblocks and building occupations have ended, and the military has taken control of Pando, the site of the worst violence.

The government also expelled US ambassador Philip Goldberg for his collaboration with the opposition in its attempts to bring down Morales.

Behind the destabilization campaign stand the agribusiness elites and gas transnationals, organized through the US embassy, who seek to destroy the Morales government's "democratic and cultural revolution."

Indigenous struggle

Although indigenous people make up a large majority of the population, Morales is Bolivia's first indigenous president. He was elected on the back of growing anti-neoliberal movements and uprisings that brought down his two predecessors, in which indigenous people played a leading role.

His government has sought to reverse the neoliberal policies that have devastated the nation over the last two decades, as well as 500 years of colonialism and genocide against indigenous peoples – through policies that include nationalizing strategic industry, land reform to benefit indigenous campesinos, and the drafting of a new constitution by an elected constituent assembly to enshrine the rights of the indigenous majority.

These policies have clashed with the interests of US and European corporations and the big landowners that are powerful in the east.

With the referendum showing growing support for Morales in the opposition's Half Moon heartland, the right wing struck out to prevent the government taking advantage of this to further erode its base.

Opposition fears were confirmed by the determination of the government to use its electoral mandate to push ahead for a referendum in December on the draft constitution.

The new constitution is at the heart of the process of change. It aims to institutionalize state control of natural resources and land reform, and to establish a "plurinational" state to overcome the exclusion of indigenous peoples.

Facing a growing rebellion against its power across Latin America, US imperialism has been furiously organizing to get rid of Morales. Since his election, the US government-funded body USAID has poured more than US\$120 million into opposition groups, while Ambassador Goldberg continually held meetings with opposition leaders. Two days after Goldberg's expulsion, Bolivia was added to the US "black list" of countries that supposedly refuse to collaborate in the "war on drugs."

Oppressed take the offensive

The government and social movements have gone on the offensive.

After organizing massive mobilizations nationally in response to the violence, and fighting off the fascist gangs in the Half Moon, the social movements have remained firm in their determination to advance the process of change.

On September 17, the National Coalition for Change (CONALCAM), which includes the most important indigenous, campesino and urban movements, signed a pact with the Bolivian Workers

Central (COB) to “defend the unity of the homeland that is being threatened by a civil coup lead by terrorists and fascists.”

Despite its often tense relationship with the government, the COB signed the agreement in the presence of Morales and other government leaders, pledging to “support and back this process of revolutionary change ... led by our brother, President Evo Morales, to construct a new homeland with the approval of a new Political Constitution of the State.”

The organizations also signalled their intention to take over unproductive large landholdings and food production factories that have refused to ensure food for the population.

Explaining that his “grand desire” was to see the COB at “the forefront of this fight,” Morales insisted that “this struggle against the oligarchic groups, against the large landowners, against people who see themselves as pro-Yankee, can only be won by the social movements.”

He explained that it is impossible to negotiate a return to the past, as the elite “want to see the return of neoliberalism and we want to definitively bury the neoliberal model.”

The day before, social organizations and the local branch of Morales’s Movement Towards Socialism party (MAS) in the rebellious plan 3000 working-class neighbourhood in Santa Cruz’s capital called for immediate declaration of martial law in Santa Cruz, Beni, Tarija, and Chuquisaca “because the Bolivian people and international public opinion demand justice.”

Over September 19-21, various social movements, including the COB, CONALCAM and the United Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia, held national gatherings to discuss further actions.

Meanwhile, the roadblocks by indigenous campesinos around Santa Cruz continue, with social movements stating that there can be no truce while the right continues to kill indigenous people. More than 8000 coca growers from the central Chapare region continue to blockade the main highway linking Santa Cruz to La Paz in the west, refusing to leave until a referendum is called on the constitution.

The Union Confederation of Colonizers of Bolivia (organization of land occupiers) stated that close to 5000 peasants from Ichilo had begun a march on Santa Cruz on September 17 to demand the resignation of the Santa Cruz governor Ruben Costas and the return of the public buildings occupied by the fascists. The same day, it was announced that 12,000 miners were preparing to march on Santa Cruz as well.

Negotiations

This occurred as talks began between the government and the opposition bloc grouped together in the National Democratic Coalition (CONALDE).

On September 18, members of the national executive sat down with the opposition governors (minus Fernandez) to discuss three central issues: the redistribution of the Direct Tax on Hydrocarbons between the departments and the government’s social programs, the new

constitution and the regional autonomy statutes proposed by the opposition, and an agreement to fill current vacancies in the constitutional tribunal and Supreme Court.

Also present were the president of the Federation of Municipal Associations, the president of the opposition-controlled Senate, and the MAS president of the chamber of deputies. Present as facilitators were representatives of the Catholic Church, the Organization of American States and Unasur.

However, Roberto Gutierrez, vice-president of the Santa Cruz Civic Committee (led by representatives of the large landowning oligarchy) argued that conditions for dialogue did not exist “if the blockade [of Santa Cruz] was maintained.”

Government spokesperson Ivan Canelas clarified that, “The decisions that the social movements make are decisions independent of the government and we value them as reactions in defence of democracy.”

CONALCAM president Fidel Surco stated that the roadblocks would continue as long as the occupation of public buildings did, and that the social movements would organize a permanent vigil outside the negotiations between the government and opposition to ensure that dialogue advanced.

On September 17, Morales stated: “If anyone, despite the support we have ... wants to remove me from the palace while I am democratically elected as president, they will have to remove me dead.”

“The struggle to reach government has not been given to us for free ... it is the result of all our efforts, and this struggle cannot just be thrown away,” he added.

“We have to finish this democratic and cultural revolution ... they are conspiring with a fascist, racist coup.

“They may be able to overthrow the Indian, but they will not be able to overthrow the Bolivian people, they will not be able to overthrow the revolutionary people.

“No matter what it costs we have to defend this process of change.”

This article was also published, in a slightly different form, in Green Left Weekly, September 20, 2008

Related reading:

- *UNASUR Declaration on Bolivia:* <<http://boliviarising.blogspot.com/2008/09/unasur-declaration-on-bolivia.html>>
- *U.S. Says It Must Intervene in Bolivian Affairs:* <<http://boliviarising.blogspot.com/2008/09/us-we-must-interfere-in-bolivian.html>>
- *Online petition in support of Bolivian democracy:* <<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/support-bolivian-democracy>>
- *For ongoing news on the struggle in Bolivia:* <<http://boliviarising.blogspot.com>>

Socialist Voice #276, September 28, 2008

NDP or Bloc? Quebec left debates election tactics

By Richard Fidler

An interesting debate over federal election tactics has developed among socialists in Québec solidaire (QS), the new left pro-sovereignty party that confines its activity to contesting Quebec, but not federal, elections. For the first time since the 1980s, the federal NDP is being considered as a valid electoral option by some, while others advocate voting for the Bloc Québécois as the best means of forestalling the re-election of the Harper government. The debate also reflects an interest among some supporters of Quebec independence in the possibility of forging new ties with progressive-minded people in English Canada.

When the October 14 election was called, QS leaders Françoise David and Amir Khadir held a news conference in which they said the challenge was to defeat the Harper government — its re-election would be a “disaster,” David said — but without indicating how opposition to Conservatives should be expressed in the election. The QS leaders focused their criticism of the Tory government on its cuts to spending on cultural activities and its moves to restrict women’s right to abortion. There was no mention of Canada’s war on Afghanistan, the environment or the threat to working people from the U.S. financial meltdown.

This position apparently did not sit well with many QS members. In a subsequent article, published in a number of newspapers, Khadir and David fleshed out their position, comparing Harper with George Bush, and citing among other things his opposition to Kyoto, his refusal to endorse the UN statement on aboriginal rights, and his “dragging Canadians into an interminable war in Afghanistan.” They urged progressive Quebecers to vote “for an ecologist Quebec, a Quebec of justice and equality, a Quebec in which the arts flourish and a Quebec that is open to difference.” Again, however, they did not indicate what form such a vote should take. The article did not mention the NDP.

Québec solidaire does not publish a newspaper, its website is confined to official statements, and there is no viable internal discussion bulletin either in print or on line. However, much of the subsequent debate has been published in the on-line journal Presse-toi-à-gauche (PTàG), which generally reflects views within Québec solidaire.

A “strategic vote”?

In its September 16 edition, Caroline Béliveau, in an article headlined “Vote against or vote for?,” wrote: “It is strange that Québec solidaire advocates such an approach, as it simply contributes to slowing down the rise of emerging and progressive parties like the NDP and QS.” The strategy of voting against, she said, amounts to “shooting ourselves in the foot. This is what has led the Bloc to parliament, and has now led us into an impasse.” She said she would be voting for the NDP candidate in her riding.

In the same issue, Bernard Rioux, a leader of Gauche socialiste, one of the recognized “collectives” or organized tendencies in QS, argued that voting for the Bloc could result in the

election of the Liberals, like the Tories a party of Big Business. Liberal governments, he said, had been the first to turn to neoliberal attacks on the welfare state, had imposed the Clarity Bill in violation of Quebec's right to national self-determination, had plunged Canada into the "criminal adventure" of the war in Afghanistan and initiated the massive increases in military spending. Furthermore, even holding the Tories to minority government status would be no victory. Liberals and Tories have voted together in Parliament on all important issues.

To vote for the Bloc, said Rioux, was to vote "for a nationalist and neoliberal alliance (PQ-Bloc) that has dominated the sovereigntist movement and led it into a complete dead end." A vote for the NDP, he said, would "underscore the need for unity of the social movements in opposition to conservative policies.... The NDP's discourse in this election is a sustained support for social mobilization against the policies identified with the Harper regime expressed in the call for withdrawal of the troops from Afghanistan, the denunciation of fiscal injustice, the desire to advance a policy of full employment, etc. The NDP defines itself as an ally of the movements on all these questions. That is why it must be supported."

However, this support could not be unconditional, Rioux explained. The NDP's "timid asymmetrical federalism, limited to a case by case policy, its lack of understanding of the aspirations expressed in the independentist struggle, demonstrate that the political left will have to replace this party on the federal scene in Quebec if a real political alliance against the federal state is to become possible."

Also in that issue of PTàG, Pascale Rioux-Oliver attacked the QS leaders' support of "strategic voting." It presents the Bloc and the Liberals as "defenders of the people, as the only serious alternative for persons on the left who seek... greater social justice," she wrote. "This habit of voting to block the most right-wing party benefits only the ever-lasting official opposition parties which, once they find themselves in power, govern the country with the same neoliberal policies."

The Bloc and the Liberals, in the last Parliament, had never combined, as they could have, to counter the Harper government's destructive policies, she noted. Where was this "opposition" when more and more soldiers were sent to Afghanistan; when military spending was multiplied; when the Tories blocked the anti-scab law, opened the way to further oil sands development, defied the Kyoto protocol on climate change?

A system of proportional representation — a long-standing campaign demand of Québec solidaire — would add "a little democracy" to our society, said Rioux-Oliver. "But perhaps it is time to look a little further than the end of our nose and to begin to think about the repercussions the succession of all these 'strategic votes' will have over several years." What is needed, she said, is a party that reflects our convictions. That is "our best bet."

The case for the Bloc

In the following edition of PTàG, dated September 23, François Cyr made the case for voting for the Bloc, "the party that in most of the 75 [Quebec] ridings, is best placed to do useful work." Cyr is the former chair of the Union des forces progressistes, one of Québec solidaire's founding components. His argument followed on an earlier contribution he had co-authored with Pierre

Beaudet of Alternatives, a federal-government funded NGO, that also defended the Bloc Québécois.

“I cannot vote for the NDP, even if the correctness of its position on the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan stands in courageous contrast with the Bloc’s procrastination on the issue,” Cyr wrote. “While its trade-union roots wither and it stands squarely in the centre of the left, the NDP appears as the most nationalist of the Canadian parties, as testified by the fact that its leader was unable, despite his promises, to block the support by his parliamentary wing to the Clarity Bill.”

Moreover, the Quebec spokesman for the NDP, Thomas Mulcair (the party’s only MP from Quebec) had quite recently served in the Quebec Liberal government, after a career as a lawyer where he had helped fight Law 101, Quebec’s popular language legislation, on behalf of the Anglophone lobby Alliance Quebec. “Some of our political friends, independentists in fact, will vote NDP forgetting that in its essence Canadian nationalism, the party’s ideological substratum, has been forged in part in opposition to Quebec’s historic demands.”

Cyr drew attention to the divisions of party allegiances within Quebec’s social movements, comparing unfavourably some of the NDP’s candidates — such as Mulcair and former Liberal MP Françoise Boivin, “the NDP’s new rising star, recently converted to Canadian social liberalism” — with some Bloc candidates “from the social movements,” such as Luc Desnoyers of the Canadian Auto Workers or Viviane Barbeau of the Federation of Quebec Women. While some “exceptional” NDP candidates were worthy of support (“where the Bloc has no chance”), “Mr. Mulcair’s team clearly controls this campaign.”

While Cyr predicated his support of the Bloc primarily on its support of Quebec sovereignty, he also saw merit in some other aspects of its program. “The Bloc, over the years has departed from its partly conservative roots, those of Lucien Bouchard, and taken fairly progressive positions, except on the intervention in Afghanistan.” The Bloc’s positions on such issues as employment insurance, anti-scab legislation, French-language rights of federal employees, etc. showed that the Bloc, a coalition party, was “now strongly influenced by its progressive wing.” And it was the “only force capable of slowing down this rise of the right, both neoliberal and neoconservative.”

Is Quebec sovereignty the only difference?

In an article also published in the September 23 edition of PTàG, André Parizeau of the Parti communiste du Québec expressed much the same position as Cyr. The pro-sovereignty PCQ, which parted company with the Communist Party of Canada two years ago, is also a recognized collective in Québec solidaire. Parizeau expressed the unanimous position taken by its central committee, also published in PTàG: vote for the Bloc except in a few ridings such as Mulcair’s Outremont, where the NDP could be supported.

Both the Bloc and the NDP are social-democratic, Parizeau wrote. “The only real difference of importance lies in the fact that there is one (the NDP) that consistently says it is against Quebec independence, while the other says it is for, although it tends to tail behind the PQ (which is another problem). When all is said and done, I fail to see how sovereigntists could continue to

claim that the NDP would be somewhat better.” And the Bloc has more support within the unions and “popular groups” than the NDP, he added.

In fact, the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) leadership has come out squarely behind the Bloc Québécois, while the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) urges an anti-Tory “strategic vote” for the Bloc, the NDP... or the Liberal candidate, whichever is best positioned to beat the Conservatives. The other major union federation, the CSQ, has not expressed a position on the federal election.

In a remarkable article also published in the September 23 PTàG, André Frappier put the fight against the political right in a broader context than other contributors to the debate. Frappier, a leader of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers in Montréal and a prominent member of Québec solidaire, was an NDP candidate in the 2004 federal election.

Frappier urged his readers to join in building an anti-Harper demonstration being organized for October 5 in Montréal by a broad coalition of unions and women’s and other grassroots organizations. “This gathering should become a high point in the election campaign, to advance our demands and publicly proclaim our rejection of conservatism and neoliberalism. The political battle must also be conducted in the streets.” He continued:

“But in the longer run we cannot disparage the need for a progressive political alternative at the pan-Canadian level. Otherwise, we are condemned to leave the political horizon either to the Conservatives or to the Liberals, we are condemned in each election to fight the party in power without having any real perspectives. This is a luxury we can no longer afford, particularly in the context of globalization and the predominance if not interference, both political and military, of the American government.”

Can the Quebec left reach others through the NDP?

We have built Québec solidaire, he noted, despite the ever-present pressure of the strategic vote. The anti-worker record of the PQ governments showed us how urgent it was to build a left-wing political alternative. However, he conceded, the special problem on the federal level is that the national question is also posed.

The Bloc’s response to this question is the opposite of what it should be. “Instead of weaving links with progressives in English Canada, the Bloc... adopts positions much more closely aligned with U.S. policy.” The Bloc claims to defend Quebec values. “Is sending Canadian troops to Afghanistan part of those values?” He quoted the Bloc’s program: “Canada will always have a role to play both in Afghanistan and within the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) [NATO’s Afghan command] to which it belongs. It must be available to accept another, less offensive, type of mission.” Furthermore, the Bloc supports NAFTA, Frappier noted.

The NDP, on the other hand, had some good positions on social and economic as well as international questions. It was the only party to oppose the Security and Prosperity Partnership; it had opposed NAFTA and the war in Afghanistan.

What about the NDP's position on the Quebec national question, then? Frappier drew attention to an article by English-Canadian feminist and socialist Judy Rebick after the previous federal election, when she wrote:

“In my view the election was a disaster for progressive ideas and movements in Canada. While the Conservatives are carefully constructing a majority for the next time, the left is deeply divided and demobilized....

“When Jack Layton announced out of the blue at the beginning of the campaign that he actually supported the Clarity Act, any chance of unity with the left in Quebec flew out the window....

“The pressure of electoral politics in the age of neo-liberalism and a relentlessly right-wing media is enormous. It is difficult for a social democratic or even a socialist party to stand up to these pressures. The only way that can happen is for social movements to pressure the party from the other side.”

Frappier said he had run for the NDP in 2004 under the influence of NDP leader Jack Layton's professed readiness to oppose the Clarity Act, and that with party approval he had identified openly as a sovereigntist. Today, under electoralist pressure, the pendulum had swung the other way.

“However, the NDP currently represents the only vehicle on which we can push in order to indicate to progressives in English Canada the importance of recognition of Quebec's self-determination. That choice will be made in Quebec and we will not accept interference from Ottawa. But it will be important, when the time comes, to have supporters who will fight for respect of our position. It is a shocking idea, even for many progressives in English Canada, but it is also a shocking idea in Quebec to undertake the construction of a federal party.

“But this dynamic, allied with mobilization in the streets, can alone enable us to go further, to weave a political solidarity between trade unionists, women's groups, and community groups in English Canada and Quebec, in order to emerge from this impasse.”

An important debate

This is an important debate among progressive pro-sovereignty Québécois. None of the participants questions participating in the federal election; no one calls for abstention, as most sovereigntists did until two decades ago. All are looking for a political alternative to neoliberalism and capitalism, although they differ on whether or how that alternative can be expressed at this time. They see the importance of waging the fight against the federal regime on federal terrain. The NDP is increasingly a factor in the debate, although even those tempted to vote for it are highly critical of its positions on the Quebec issue. (They also tend to exaggerate the progressiveness of some key NDP positions.) The labor movement, as always in recent decades, is divided on electoral tactics as on political strategy in general.

This debate among Québec solidaire members and supporters is much needed. After a promising beginning, as a fusion of various political and social forces on the broad left, the party has stalled, in part because its sole focus on Quebec electoral politics has contributed to a certain parochialism and electoralism that inhibits its ability to develop a coherent program on international and class questions and a mass-action strategy to implement it.

The crisis of perspectives of the sovereignty movement, and the threat to Quebec working people from the neoliberal offensive orchestrated by the federal government, are encouraging some rethinking among Quebec socialists on the question of alliances between the left in Quebec and the Rest of Canada (ROC).

Socialists in the ROC need to take note, and respond positively to this opening. If nothing else, the NDP's inability to develop as a credible contender for federal office — in large part because of its historic opposition to Quebec's self-determination — is striking proof that the left in both nations suffers greatly from their lack of mutual solidarity and a common, coordinated political strategy by which to express it.

Richard Fidler is a Socialist Voice Contributing Editor. This article was originally posted on September 25 in his blog, Life on the Left.

Sources: Presse-toi-à-gauche; Québec solidaire