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Socialist Voice #75, January 8, 2006

Bloc's Election Challenge Reflects Changing Face of Quebec Politics

By Richard Fidler

Editors' Note: The following is the first of a two-part analysis, by Richard Fidler, of the federal elections in Quebec. The second part, "Federalist NDP No Alternative in Quebec," is published in Socialist Voice #62. —Roger Annis and John Riddell

The pro-sovereignty Bloc Québécois is poised to win its fifth consecutive majority of seats in Quebec in Canada's January 23 federal election. The party is on track to win almost all of the ridings with a French-speaking majority, and possibly more than 50% of the popular vote — an electoral first for a party promoting Quebec independence.

With few seats in Quebec, neither the governing Liberals nor the rightist Conservative Party may be able to form a government with a parliamentary majority.

In Quebec, the Liberals and Conservatives are fighting over what remains of the federalist vote. The Tories are serving up former prime minister Brian Mulroney's "flexible federalism" (although outside Quebec their slogan is "Stand Up for Canada"). The Liberals warn that a Tory minority government will ally with the Bloc and help break up Canada.

A minority government without significant representation in Quebec is an unsettling prospect for Canada's ruling elite. Quebec is headed toward an election in 2007 that is widely expected to result in a victory for the sovereigntist Parti québécois (PQ) followed by a referendum that may well produce a majority vote for secession from Canada. Adding to these destabilizing trends is the ongoing social ferment in Quebec as unions and students continue to mobilize in militant opposition to the Quebec Liberal government's austerity policies.

Dress rehearsal for the next referendum

This federal election is in fact shaping up as a pre-referendum. The Bloc, which held 54 of Quebec's 75 seats in the last Parliament, clearly has the political initiative. It is campaigning as the party of all Quebecers around a program that condemns the corruption and mismanagement of the federal Liberal government and attempts — as BQ leader Gilles Duceppe puts it in his introduction to the party's published platform — to “show what a sovereign Quebec might look like”. (See Plateforme électorale, Campagne 2005-2006, www.blocquebécois.org).

The Bloc's slate of candidates reflects the changing demographic face of Quebec. A half-dozen or so candidates are from the “cultural communities”. The “children of Bill 101”, educated in the French-language public school system, are now much more integrated within Quebec society than previous generations of immigrants, and many view themselves as primarily Québécois, not Canadians. The Bloc's parliamentary contingent has already included MPs of African, Chinese and Chilean origin. An aboriginal Bloc MP, Bernard Cleary, is up for re-election in Québec City.

The Bloc has the support of the Quebec Federation of Labour. Luc Desnoyers, Quebec director of the Canadian Auto Workers, has put the union's jacket on Duceppe. A number of Bloc candidates are members of trade unions or the UPA, the farmer's union.

At its origins in the early 1990s, the Bloc saw itself as little more than a watchdog in Ottawa for the Parti québécois (PQ), in anticipation of a successful Quebec referendum. Today, it campaigns around a detailed 250-page platform that could be implemented by the National Assembly of an independent Quebec.

While the PQ has historically advocated some form of “association” between a sovereign Quebec and Canada, the Bloc's platform avoids any such reference. It does not mention the divisions between the PQ and the Quebec Liberal government of Jean Charest, but purports to represent the interests of Quebec, full stop. The platform indicts the federal regime's policies and priorities and, in doing so, indicates how a sovereign Quebec would perform differently.

What Quebec wants, and does not want, according to the Bloc

The Bloc platform restates themes long voiced by Quebec nationalists. A focal point is its critique of the “fiscal imbalance” — Ottawa's use of its taxation powers to pile up huge budget surpluses while starving Quebec and the other provinces of the funds they need to manage social policy and other programs within their jurisdiction. “Half of the taxes paid by Quebecers are controlled by a government that refuses to recognize the Quebec nation,” it says. “The federal government uses these taxes to multiply intrusions, weaken the Quebec state and impose Canada's choices. A viable and effective democracy cannot exist in these conditions.”

The Bloc cites federal cutbacks in areas crucial to regional development and redressing income inequality. A notorious example is the changes in Employment Insurance. Ottawa's tightening of eligibility means that only 46% of workers paying into it can get benefits when they lose their jobs. And the federal government continues to manage the surpluses in the EI fund — now totaling \$46.2 billion — as its own money, to spend in areas not under its jurisdiction.

Federal transfers under shared-cost programs, which once covered 50% of post-secondary education, are now down to 18% while costs have increased exponentially. Meanwhile, Ottawa initiated the Millennium Scholarship fund for individual students as a means of raising the federal profile, although education is not a federal responsibility.

It was the fiscal imbalance, the Bloc says, that forced Quebec to raise the cost of its exemplary childcare plan, a key component of its family policy, from \$5 to \$7 a day per family. When Ottawa finally introduced its own program — which, unlike Quebec's, is not universal and is much less generous — it took a further 16 months to concede full and unconditional financial compensation to Quebec for declining to participate.

Ottawa's spending priorities are seriously skewed, the Bloc charges. For example, Quebec's energy resources — a key environmental concern — are hydroelectricity and, increasingly, wind power. However, over the last 30 years Ottawa has spent \$66 billion in direct subsidies to the fossil fuel industries (coal, natural gas and oil) and only \$329 million to renewable energy. Similarly, it has given billions to the Ontario automobile industry. The taxpayers are being used to prop up the most polluting industries in Canada, says the Bloc.

The Bloc program cites many instances of federal mismanagement of its authority over major Quebec industries, such as its failure to prevent the destruction of fish stocks along the Atlantic coast caused by overfishing. It castigates Ottawa for failing to mount an adequate defense of the farm supply management system (including Quebec's huge dairy industry) at the World Trade Organization talks.

While Quebec, since 1985, has recognized the existence of a dozen aboriginal nations on its territory and has negotiated a number of treaties — most recently, the Paix des Braves with the Grand Council of the Crees — Ottawa has yet to negotiate similar agreements with the Crees under its jurisdiction, the Bloc notes.

Twenty-five years after Quebec adopted anti-scab legislation, Ottawa has yet to enact similar provisions in the Canada Labour Code. They could have been of decisive assistance recently to the striking workers at Videotron, Radio Canada and Secur, all of whom are under federal jurisdiction, says the Bloc.

The now-notorious sponsorship program is of course a prime target for the Bloc. As the recent inquiry by Justice John Gomery documented, Ottawa spent \$332 million on this patronage-plagued effort to raise the federal profile in Quebec. Forty-four percent of that money went to ad agencies, which then kicked a portion of the funds back to the federal Liberal party. The Bloc platform points out that the party raised questions about the sponsorship program for years before the federal Auditor General got around to examining it.

The Bloc's election platform repeatedly identifies Quebec's lack of national status under Canada's constitution as the basic problem underlying all others. For example, Quebec assigns great importance to its ability to attract and integrate immigrants as a means of countering the relative decline and ageing of its population. Fifteen years ago it managed to get the federal government to allow it to select about half of its immigrants. But the federal government continues to impose restrictions on family class and refugee applicants. Quebec's low visibility

abroad (it has little consular representation) means many immigrants are unaware of its potential as a place of residence.

Quebec has developed a concept of citizenship focused on French as the common language of public life. But the status of the French language — always fragile in the North American context — is constantly subject to challenge under Canada's constitution, especially since the 1982 patriation amendments that Quebec's National Assembly unanimously refused to ratify.

What the Bloc wants

While socialists can sympathize with the Bloc's positions on these and many other issues, other planks in the Bloc platform — and some silences — underscore the party's pro-capitalist nature.

Most notable is its international policy. At its November convention, the Bloc endorsed membership of a sovereign Quebec in the NATO and NORAD military alliances. Although the election platform does not mention that decision, it does laud the NATO invasion and Canadian troops' occupation of Afghanistan.

The Bloc supported Canada's participation in the overthrow of the Aristide government in Haiti, and the platform calls for a priority "long-term commitment... to participating in the United Nations mission" in Haiti.

The Bloc platform misleadingly states, more than once, that Canada "has no foreign policy". In reality, the Bloc's foreign policy is fundamentally indistinguishable from that of the Liberals and Tories.

Missing entirely from the platform is any expression of solidarity with other movements for national sovereignty in countries oppressed by imperialism. In Latin America, the Bloc endorses the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), not the rival and increasingly popular Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean (ALBA) proposed by the revolutionary nationalist Venezuelan government.

Like the PQ, the Bloc is an enthusiastic supporter of the North American Free Trade Agreement and advocates a similar trade and investment deal with the European Union. Its support of free trade in lumber exports will alienate ecologists who have campaigned against irresponsible timber exploitation, the "erreur boréale" publicized by musician and film-maker Richard Desjardins.

The Bloc health care platform is silent on private health insurance, a key issue in Quebec in the wake of the Supreme Court Chaoulli decision. Similarly, it fails to address the danger to medicare from escalating patent drug prices, probably because of the cozy relationship between the Quebec government and the pharmaceutical giants based in the province.

On Canada's participation in the "war on terror", the Bloc advocates "balancing" civil liberties against security concerns, but does not call for repeal of the repressive anti-terrorist laws.

Overall, the Bloc's "sovereign" Quebec is little more than a Quebec-centered replica of Canada as we know it: a "normal" state, as the Bloc says, that would essentially substitute Quebec

jurisdictions for Canada's but does not indicate a major new departure toward a more just and egalitarian society, let alone socialism.

Quebec, not Ottawa, looked to for social change

Yet the popular appeal of the Bloc, it should be clear, lies not in its "normality" but in the promise it holds out that an independent Quebec can do better. When the Bloc inveighs against cuts in federal transfers for health care and education or when it protests cutbacks in employment insurance and other federal policies that harm workers, farmers, fishers and aboriginal peoples, it is addressing problems facing all who inhabit Quebec, regardless of ethnic origin, skin colour, religion or even mother tongue — in short, the Quebec nation. And for a growing number of Québécois, the solutions to those problems are conceived in a Quebec, not Canadian context. The Canadian state is no longer seen to be the most appropriate framework for working out the solutions to these problems. In fact, it is increasingly viewed as an obstacle to their solution.

As the Bloc's mixed ethnic and class composition and support indicates, this party — initiated in 1990 by Tory and Liberal MPs disillusioned by English Canada's rejection of the Meech Lake Accord — now attracts support from a wide cross-section of Quebec's population. It is a manifestation in the federal electoral and parliamentary arena of the new Quebec nation that has been forged over the last four decades, a Quebec that is less divided linguistically and culturally than ever before even as it is more class-divided and ethnically diverse.

However, the Bloc is also the antechamber for the Parti québécois, Quebec's dominant sovereigntist party, which does not contest federal elections. The PQ, during its 18 years in office, enacted some progressive reforms, most notably in the area of legislation to protect and enforce French-language rights. But it also implemented capitalist austerity programs, attacked the unions, rolled back wages of public sector workers (in one instance, by 20%) and failed to lead mass extra-parliamentary struggles even in support of its own rather modest complaints about the limitations of existing fiscal and jurisdictional arrangements.

PQ governments in recent years enforced federal spending cutbacks by applying a "zero deficit" policy that devastated many social programs and further impoverished low-income workers, the unemployed and welfare recipients.

The PQ's support of capitalist trade and investment deals has alienated many activists in the labour movement and disoriented many in English Canada who had been sympathetic to Quebec's national demands in an earlier period.

In fact, it is the consistently procapitalist and pro-imperialist outlook and policies of both the PQ and the Bloc that most decisively demark them from the national liberation movements in the "third world" countries subordinated to U.S. and world imperialism.

As often as not, the PQ has proved to be an obstacle to building a mass movement for national affirmation and political independence. Its record in office has produced great ambivalence about the party and even the independence project itself among many workers.

Quebec workers party yet to be built

Neither the PQ nor the Bloc can be looked to for leadership in the fight to build a Quebec governed by and in the interests of its working people.

In early February, activists from the women's movement, the antiglobalization movement, the student movement, unions and grassroots community groups will gather in Montreal to found a new left party. Initiated by the fledgling Union des forces progressistes and Option citoyenne, which are now merging, the new party will have an initial membership of three to four thousand who will attempt to build a mass progressive sovereigntist party independent of the capitalist parties that now dominate the political landscape in Quebec.

However, neither the UFP nor Option citoyenne is running candidates in the present federal election. There is no party in this election that advances a distinct working-class agenda. The federal New Democratic Party has nominated candidates in all 75 Quebec ridings. But the NDP, instead of championing Quebec rights and forging an alliance with Quebec supporters of sovereignty, is competing with the Liberals and Tories for its share of the declining federalist vote. Its hostility to Quebec self-determination precludes the party from consideration as a major contender.

A mass workers party has yet to be built in Quebec. But the Bloc's current hegemony in working-class constituencies is a further reminder that the path to independent working-class political action in Quebec is inseparable from defense of the right to self-determination.

Richard Fidler edited Canada, Adieu? – Quebec Debates its Future (Oolichan Books and Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1991, 328 pages), a commentary on and translated excerpts from briefs to the Bélanger-Campeau Commission on the Political and Constitutional Future of Quebec.

Socialist Voice #76, January 8, 2006

Federalist NDP No Alternative in Quebec

By Richard Fidler

Editors' note: In "Election Challenge to the NDP" *Socialist Voice* condemned the New Democratic Party for lining up with the federal state against the national rights of Quebec but did not discuss the character of the NDP campaign in Quebec. That omission is made good in the following article by Richard Fidler, which completes his analysis of the elections in Quebec begun in *Socialist Voice* #75. We agree with Richard's conclusion that the present federal NDP campaign in Quebec does not advance the cause of independent labour political action and is not worthy of support.—*Roger Annis and John Riddell*

In 2004 NDP leader Jack Layton, campaigning in Quebec, came out against the *Clarity Act*, Ottawa's legislation arrogantly asserting its right to dictate the terms of a successful Quebec referendum on sovereignty. He was quickly disavowed by members of his own parliamentary caucus and some provincial NDP leaders.

In this election campaign, Layton has come out foursquare in defense of the *Clarity Act*. Speaking in Montreal on December 7, Layton said he had reversed his opposition to the Act and now considers it "acceptable". He said, "It follows directly from the principles laid out by the Supreme Court...."

Layton's comments were made in a speech setting forth the NDP's conditions for supporting a minority government in the next federal Parliament. A key condition is the enactment of some system of proportional representation (PR).

Layton is careful to point out that PR will limit the representation in Parliament now enjoyed by the "separatists". He told the *Hamilton Spectator* last August 24: "We think that with proportional representation in Canada, and in Quebec, you'd never have a referendum on separation again." (Quoted in *Le Devoir*, December 16)

More recently, Layton has begun echoing Liberal leader Paul Martin's warning that a Tory minority government will ally with the Bloc Québécois to help "to dismantle the Canadian state", as he told reporters January 4.

For his part, Quebec NDP leader Pierre Ducasse, instead of appealing to Quebec nationalists to support the NDP as a party that fights for Quebec rights, is openly appealing to Liberals to support the NDP as the appropriate federalist alternative to their scandal-ridden party.

Indeed, any appeal to Quebec nationalists would be precluded by the statement adopted in 2005 by the Quebec Council of the NDP, "La voix du Québec: la voie d'un Canada différent (Fédéralisme, social-démocratie et la question québécoise)":

This nine-page document resurrects the NDP's "cooperative federalism" position of the 1960s, in the early years of the Quiet Revolution. It is ahistorical and abstract, containing virtually no

references to the actual evolution of federal-provincial relations, the federalist offensive against Quebec (which is far more than the sponsorship scandal), and the real confrontation that now exists and is continuing to develop between the independence movement and the federal regime.

- The document presents the Bloc québécois as the obstacle to “the emergence of a united left in Canada.”
- It puts the Quebec NDP squarely within the federalist camp (“The NDP ... will promote a united Canada”), and says most of its positions can be implemented within the present constitutional framework without any changes.
- It presents a “vision” of “asymmetrical federalism” that completely overlooks the real record of federal intrusions on Quebec’s constitutional powers. It cites the “Social Union” agreement of 1999 (signed by NDP premiers) as its model of cooperative federalism, although that agreement was widely criticized in Quebec, and even subjected to sharp criticism by some Liberals such as Claude Ryan for violating Quebec rights. The agreement was not signed by Quebec.
- It talks about “good faith” negotiations between Quebec and Ottawa, but fails to stake out a negotiating position or point of departure for Quebec. No trade unionist would want to enter negotiations on that basis.
- Quebec is a nation, the document says, but the NDP thinks it is not necessary or useful to legally or constitutionally formalize the right of self-determination.
- In a referendum on Quebec’s constitutional status, it says, fifty percent plus one is a sufficient mandate for change. But the statement is silent on the Clarity Act; the federal government’s responsibility, it says, is to “determine its own process”.
- It mentions that Quebec has not ratified the 1982 Canadian Constitution, but ignores the fact that the federal NDP and the NDP provincial governments did ratify it.

This statement, featured by Ducasse on his web site, appears to mark the definitive triumph of the Layton leadership over any residual autonomist stirrings in the Quebec NDP rump.

The NDP’s hostility to Quebec self-determination has placed it in frontal opposition to the national consciousness of most Quebec working people. As a result, the party’s popular support in Quebec is marginal and its ties with the labour movement almost non-existent. Although some individual NDP candidates in Quebec may hold differing views, their campaigns are inevitably burdened by the party’s official policies on Quebec and do not advance the cause of independent labour political action.

Socialist Voice #77, January 26, 2006

Socialism Is Not a Chance Option for Cubans

by Francisco Soberon Valdes

A speech by the head of Cuba's National Bank, to the National Assembly, December 2005. A CubaNews translation by Ana Portela. Edited by Walter Lippmann.

During 2005, our country achieved an extraordinary economic growth that proved the certainty of the economic strategy designed by compañero Fidel.

These results compel us, now more than ever, to meditate profoundly about the actions that must be taken and the distortions that must be solved to guarantee the sustainability of our economic growth.

To cover this subject, I would begin by emphasizing that for 46 years the Revolution has always tried, even under the worst of circumstances, to assure as equal a distribution as possible, as corresponds to the moral values of our socialist system.

Under capitalism, absolute insecurity about the future and the threat of being literally crushed by that fierce and inhuman system forces persons to use all their physical and intellectual resources, not only to obtain a daily survival but, also, to try to create a monetary reserve that could free them, at least partially, from this distressing insecurity.

In our socialist system this climate of uncertainty disappears and man is guaranteed a large part of his basic necessities, regardless of his contribution to society.

Compañero Fidel once said that the Revolution would not achieve its highest moral values until we are capable of producing more as free men than as slaves. I believe that, in this area of social consciousness, we have not yet achieved those high values.

Under these circumstances, it is of utmost importance that the distribution of goods and services is clearly and directly linked to the standard of living with the effort of each from the position he occupies in our economic structure.

Certain actions undertaken during the special period, others absolutely necessary and others inexcusable errors, moved us away from this strategic objective. The main results of this situation have been greater levels of inequalities and tendencies of wasting the resources of the state.

Looking upon it from a distance, it becomes evident that the only thing that can definitely make up, in socialism, for the extortion applied to workers in capitalism, without lowering efficiency is a true understanding of the need to work, not for fear of hunger and helplessness but with the desire to develop the country and raise the standard of living of everyone. However, the urgent daily necessities also demonstrate that, to satisfy them, we cannot wait to travel along the long road required for this conviction to become generalized and become daily actions.

Perhaps one of the most complex problems faced by a socialist revolution is achieving effectiveness in economic management without giving up the strategic, political objectives of

creating a communist consciousness. The reason is simple: while we work to forge a communist consciousness, material necessities are urgently present and solutions must be found in an ever more anarchic, unjust and even dangerous world for the survival of Third World countries.

I believe that to solve this evident contradiction we must find economic formulas based on our specific conditions that, during the period, in which a communist consciousness is forged and guaranty a greater contribution of each to our socialist society.

Delving into this subject, we must remember that, in our country, there are highly subsidized prices for certain products and basic services presenting two different situations for the common citizen, depending on whether he receives incomes that are not a result of his work in the state sector, with a rapid rise of monetary resources that sometimes permits him to choose whether or not to work without affecting his standard of living.

It is not necessary to go into discussions to conclude that it is simply catastrophic for the economy of a country and, ethically and morally, unacceptable that someone of working age can live comfortably without the need to work.

As for the worker who lives with his salary, he finds himself in a difficult situation because the money he earns may be more than he needs for controlled products. However, it is not enough to buy products that are also necessary but which are sold at market prices.

All these factors contribute to a situation where the salary no longer truly motivates him to keep his work and, often, his labor link with the State is sometimes kept and others, for a number of reasons, some honorable ones such as self esteem and a sentiment of revolutionary duty; but others do not feel the same things, unfortunately, including covering up for criminal activities.

I would add something more: there is a prevalent feeling in many compatriots, perhaps, subconsciously, a pernicious concept: struggle to obtain material goods, as much as possible, for him and his family regardless of his contribution to society; without establishing any link between duty to contribute and right to receive. This latter is particularly damaging in cases, where, due to the post occupied, that person has authority over important material wealth, becoming a primary factor of corruption and fraud.

There is one obvious and simple truth that we must not forget and that is often ignored. In whatever space of society (a town, a city, a country) there are limited quantities of material goods of variable degrees of scarcity and a limited number of necessities because the human being is never satisfied with what he has but aspires to have more. Precisely, this is what capitalism relies on to promote an uncontrolled consumerism that sickens and underrates human spirituality.

Socialism confers dignity upon man and frees him from that alienating consumerism; there can be no fairer formula to solve this contradiction than what Marx explained more than a century ago: each should use to the full his capacities and receive according to his work.

As compañero Fidel has explained our present system of distribution does not correspond to that principle. Among the causes we can observe that goods and services are offered at prices highly

subsidized without taking into consideration the contribution to society and source of incomes of those who receive them.

Looking at it from a social level, the idea of goods and services guaranteed for all equally does not seem to be wrong.

However, under the new conditions created since the special period, with the sector of the population receiving incomes in foreign currency from abroad or high amount of national currency from legal or illegal activities ruled by the severe rules of market; such a system is highly vicious. It is nothing less; a formula that provides the same benefits to those who receive a modest salary through their work for the state, in contrast to those who receive incomparably higher incomes in foreign or national currency without contributing in any significant way to the economy of the country. In many cases, getting involved in activities counter to the proper road of our society including the theft of resources, from that same socialist state that has to manage to deal with the privilege of these disproportionate subsidies.

Paradoxically, the present system of highly subsidized distribution aimed at guaranteeing the basic needs to those who live from their salary and at their cost, also, benefits a rather large number of persons who receive incomes in foreign currency or higher salaries in national currency to such an extent that they can cover the subsidized products and services for a year for a fraction of their incomes.

Lastly, as compañero Fidel has repeated, the present system of distribution induces a good part of the population to spend their time redistributing according to their preferences through such a primitive and disturbing bartering system of products they receive in the ration book or “redistribute” buying and selling rationed products at market prices according to their preferences and possibilities. At the same time it is more complex to confront the great promoters of the black market because, for example, they can sell five pounds of sugar from a family who use less sugar than allotted in the ration book; or a thief who has stolen ten sacks of sugar, often taking advantage of his position in the distribution chain of controlled products, for his criminal purposes.

Summarizing, in addition to the morally valid principle of an equal distribution we are promoting the social and economic toxic privilege of conferring power to the dollar; benefiting those who profit from the necessities of the people and protecting those who produce less allowing them to sit back and pleasantly enjoy the high profits derived from state subsidized products and basic services obtained at ridiculously low prices if compared to their level of income.

The weakness and paternalism of many cadres responsible for directing economic institutions of the country are factors that aggravate more all these problems.

Concluding this analysis I dare to affirm that the best alternative to achieve our political and social objectives that has been applied in the case of electricity taxes promoted by compañero Fidel, raising prices and making salary adjustments according to the social importance of each person in his work. This formula gradually reduces the inequalities created or increased during the special period; aids the necessary financial equilibrium, contributes to establish a direct relationship between the quality and quantity of goods and services produced by each and the

money received for his work; and will lead us eventually to rid ourselves of the ration book that would be, undoubtedly, a great important step in the current strategy of the Revolution to achieve a maximum of savings, a growing efficiency and economic invulnerability.

I understand that this position could be a difficult reasoning point for several generations that we observed in controlled distribution, an unquestionable right of irreversible character.

However, I subscribe in mental peace, the conclusion that Marx reached in 1875 when he wrote: "...Rights can never be greater than economic structure nor cultural development of the society it has set up."

Upon expressing these ideas we run the risk that some may consider that we are trying to imply that persons only work for money. That would be a grotesque interpretation of socialism, of a most vulgar relationship that any ignorant person can realize in capitalism. It is something that is much more complex and difficult.

What is at risk is how to achieve a formula of distribution that would impulse each to give their maximum to the economy because when this is done it is good for that person, his family and for society and, at the same time, prevents the activities of those who have found questionable means to receive high incomes without contributing to the national economy, to abusively benefit from the work of those who create wealth for the country.

Also, it is simply inadmissible to perpetuate a system that propitiates the U.S. to graciously receive the benefit of the emigration of highly qualified Cuban professionals, formed free of charge by the sweat of our people and to make this abuse more onerous; take advantage of the remittances sent by emigrants (that are a significant part of the salary they would receive because of their excellent qualifications) to have in Cuba a humiliating purchasing power. This is morally and ethically offensive for those of us in our country who constitute the support of our society and, as our only material benefit, receive a modest salary in national currency.

Lastly, I would like to offer the following thought:

In the USSR the errors made led to popular unrest caused, among other reasons, because of the poor functioning of the economy and its effect on the deterioration of the standard of life of a great part of the population. Under these conditions, after more than 70 years of socialism the only thing left for it to do was to dissolve the Communist Party and, with this action, bury a nation founded by the thousand fold glorious October Revolution, with the wave of a pen and piece of paper.

This is an historical lesson that we must never forget if we want to preserve our socialist revolution and together with that, our Cuban nationality, that would disappear the same way and at the same time that socialism ceases to exist in Cuba. To prevent this from happening we must achieve an economic situation "whereby the Republic is self sufficient", as demanded by Rubén Martínez Villena in his vibrant Lyrical Civilian Message.

It is true that in our specific situation, we have a colossal safeguard of Socialism that is our faith in our people, in Fidel and Raul. But if we do not manage to continue to increase the standard of living of the population and guarantee a program of sustainable development we are running the

risk that these great personalities will become the only pillar that maintains this system and then we would be denying the affirmation of the Commander-in-Chief whereby our population made the historically constitutional decision that socialism is not a chance option for Cubans but a future we have freely chosen with irreversible character.

Socialist Voice #78, January 26, 2006

‘Cuba Represents the Possibility of a Better World!’

by Felipe Pérez Roque

Speech by Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba at the 6th Session of the 6th Legislation of the Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular [Cuban Parliament], held at the Palacio de las Convenciones on December 23rd, 2005, “Year of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas”.

Source: http://www.cubaminrex.cu/Archivo/Canciller/2005/FPR_231205.htm

A CubaNews translation. Edited by Walter Lippmann and by Socialist Voice

Compañero Commander;

Compañero Alarcón;

Compañeros:

To provide a bit of information on what this heroic year that now ends has meant to our country in the area of foreign affairs, I would now like to offer some facts and some thoughts.

The first thought is that this year there has been a consolidation of the trend whereby the Revolution has defeated the project of international isolation against Cuba imposed with full strength and great resources by imperialism.

Today Cuba has full diplomatic relations with 178 of the 191 United Nations member countries and also with two other States, Palestine and Sahara, which are not yet members of the UN, but are struggling to one day become totally independent and in control of their territories.

We have 136 Cuban diplomatic and consular missions in 112 countries. The enemy has not been able to stop the Revolution from extending its presence in the world and strengthening its bonds of friendship, cooperation and respect with other countries. Of the 136 missions, 109 are small embassies with very limited resources and personnel, but they fulfill their task and put forth the message of our country, with sturdy conviction and great fidelity to our people, to the remotest corners of the planet.

Today, in Havana there are 95 diplomatic and consular missions representing 88 countries and 7 international organizations. Of all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean Cuba is perhaps the one with the most foreign diplomatic representation. Foreign diplomats in Cuba travel to the provinces every year. This year they have been visiting several territories and seeing in situ many of our development programs and speaking to the people. This is a first fact.

The enemy has not been able to isolate the Revolution. It could not isolate it; and today the Revolution and the country have more prestige, more authority than ever, more relations and more contacts than ever, and we have more visitors, more delegations, more visits from heads of state from other countries than ever. Our relations have grown, based on the admiration of our resistance and our triumphs in all these years of deep challenge and crisis of the Special Period.

Secondly, the rejection of the blockade became almost universal this year. Of the 191 UN member countries, 182 voted against the blockade, a historical record.

Since 1992, when for the first time in the UN there was a vote against the blockade and Cuba obtained 59 votes for the Resolution, 123 countries have joined the ranks against the blockade in the last 13 years, one hundred and twenty three countries! Even allies of the United States have been forced to vote against the blockade by the pressure of public opinion and the pressure of the United Nations. This year 182 countries voted against the blockade; four countries did not: the United States, its ally Israel, and two countries that are virtually protectorates of the United States, Marshall Islands and Palau, two small islands in the Pacific that were occupied during the Second World War and which now have a shackled independence with a kind of Platt Amendment, where the US decides how they must vote in international organizations; and one abstention: Micronesia, which in spite of having the same status still resists and does not vote against Cuba. There are four countries that do not vote, that do not participate: Nicaragua and El Salvador in Latin America — and we know why this is so, Morocco in Northern Africa that sets a condition for their favorable vote, i.e. a trade-off which entails that we abandon our historical position of principles in support of the Saharawi people in exchange for their supporting vote. To this we say no, because we base our foreign policy on principles and do not renounce the fair cause of supporting the Saharawi people. The other country is Iraq, occupied by US troops. These are the countries that do not vote against the blockade.

In other words, the rejection of the blockade is universal. The Bush administration is more isolated than ever in its policy of blockade against our country.

Next year, in September, our country will host the Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement; 114 Non-Aligned countries will meet in Havana for the second time, in a Summit Conference and will elect Cuba as the President of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and our Commander-in-Chief as the President of the Movement for the next three years.

This year, for the first time during the discussion of the Resolution on the Blockade, the United States withdrew from the debate; their lack of arguments, their lack of moral grounds was such that they decided to withdraw from the list of speakers and waive their turn to speak.

This year the most important international fora supported Cuba in its struggle against the blockade: the Second Summit of the Countries in the South, of the Group of the 77, which is made up of 134 countries; the Summit of the Association of Caribbean States; the Iberian-American Summit with more than 20 countries; the Second Summit between Cuba and CARICOM held recently in Barbados with the presence of Compañero Fidel made strong and explicit statements demanding that the US administration put an end to the genocidal blockade against the Cuban people.

Thirdly, this year our country waged a victorious battle in the field of ideas against the campaigns orchestrated and financed by the imperial regime of President Bush aimed at damaging Cuba's prestige and misinforming about its reality; at the Commission for Human Rights, we exposed the hypocrisy and double standards of their European Union allies who, while accepting to vote against Cuba — as the Comandante explained yesterday — kept a

shameful and submissive silence on a resolution demanding an investigation of the tortures at the Guantanamo Naval Base, an illegally-occupied Cuban territory which the US Government has turned into a prison camp. This territory in the Bay of Guantanamo is held by the US against our will.

This year, for the first time, there was a call signed by more than 5 000 intellectuals, including eight Nobel Prize winners, demanding a stop to the maneuvers by the United States and the campaigns against Cuba at the Commission for Human Rights; there has not been a single statement by intellectuals and Nobel Prize winners in favor of the imperial regime of George W. Bush.

They have the military power, but they do not have the moral authority, the support; they are isolated in the world and this is a symptom of the decadence of a regime that plans to lead a “transition” in Cuba and turn this country into a colony of the United States. They cannot, they have no support; they base their actions on the rule of the strongest, on threats, on blackmail, not on the morality of their acts or the ethical transparency of their behavior. They are feared but they are not respected. We Cubans are respected in the world, we are admired and with each passing day, we are more publicly and more consciously acknowledged.

This year — and this is the fourth thought — witnessed an unprecedented strengthening of Cuban cooperation with the Third World: while the United States escalated the blockade, while they applied a 100% of the measures passed in the project that Bush had signed the year before, while they made the blockade tougher, while they put pressure on the companies [which have businesses with Cuba], while they generously financed their mercenary groups in Cuba, while they harassed every business arrangement, every initiative for Cuba, while they did all that, this year — as explained here before — was the year of Operación Milagro [Project Miracle], 208 000 patients with eyesight problems were operated on, including our own Cuban patients; this was the year when we graduated 1612 doctors from 27 countries at the Latin American School of Medical Sciences [in a graduation ceremony] that became virtually a Summit of Heads of States and Governments of countries that came here to thank Cuba’s gesture and the example being set by Cuba.

In the school year that ended this summer, our country, that is our universities, graduated a total of 2,422 foreign students from 115 countries.

We have graduated more than 45 000 young people from 120 countries during these years of Revolution — forty five thousand! More than 32 000 of them from Africa. That is why when one goes to Africa one is able to meet a Minister who graduated in Cuba, or a director of an important company, or a famous doctor who graduated in Cuba, because more than 32 000 young Africans have graduated in Cuba and they have organized Cuba friendship associations in their countries and are grateful and speak Spanish and still ask about Cuban baseball teams and when you ask, “Where are you from?” They say, “From Camagüey, from Santiago or from Havana,” because they studied here, in these universities. They are people from the same African lands where our compatriots went to fight for their freedom.

This was the year when we celebrated the anniversary of Operación Carlota [Cuban military operation in Angola], when with great emotion we participated in the tribute and homage our people rendered to our internationalist soldiers and the 2,000 compatriots that gave their lives in the frontline struggle against colonialism, against apartheid. And from these same countries where our generous blood was spilled, more than 32,000 young people have graduated in Cuba. This year we graduated more than 2,400 foreign students from all over the world, and right now in Cuba there are more than 19,000 young students from Third World countries enjoying free scholarships given by the Revolution.

This year also witnessed an increase, like never before, in the medical services of our country. As you heard here a while ago, more than 25,000 Cuban health workers serve in 68 countries and in 28 of these they do it as part of the Integral Health Program. This was the year of the “Henry Reeve” Medical Contingent [Medical Contingent trained and equipped to act on situations of natural disasters]. I had the privilege to see them in action in Pakistan.

When we talked about our female compañeros and the role of women, redeemed by the Revolution and who today play a key and indispensable role in every task of the Revolution, as our colleague Yolanda explained a while ago, I recalled that a Pakistani military CO— Pakistani military are very close to the work being done by our doctors, they are the main witnesses of what our aid workers have done there — had told me that when he reported to the General Staff that when the jeep driving the Cuban women could not go on because the road was closed, the women had shouldered the backpacks and had walked five kilometers to reach the villages, and that when the military escorts saw this they decided to walk with them, the General Staff told him to correct his report, “Please check this because there must be a mistake. You said on foot?” “Yes, yes, on foot, they went walking.” “And you said women?” “Yes, I said women.” This is what he told me. He told me, “Our admiration to see how you people walk all over these mountains where you had never been before, looking for a pregnant woman or a sick patient, or visiting a previously treated patient.”

I would say this has been a year when the collaboration of Cuba with the world, already historical and a pillar of the Revolution, this year in particular has been stronger and wider. And this is nothing compared to the projects already in development and for the future which were explained here by Compañero Fidel

While all this was happening, President Bush decided to tighten the blockade; Ms. Condoleezza Rice presided over this meeting where she said it was about time and that by May they would present new ideas to President Bush. As you know, the Bush administration passed the project whose first chapter includes all these measures they have been applying: tighten the blockade, put a stop to family contacts and everything else; in addition to these there are the chapters referring to the “administration of Cuba”. They have already designated the man who would be the governor in Cuba, the new Leonard Wood of this century who would act here as the Yankee governor; well, we have already discussed all that.

This year we held more than 600 meetings in the country, in every province, to discuss these topics and 170,000 compatriots participated directly in the discussions.

While all these was happening, while the country was doing such a tremendous effort not only nationwide but also abroad, in a most noble and generous way as no country in history has ever done, while all this was happening, the Bush regime sank even lower in discredit.

When Compañero Fidel said yesterday and this morning, “They cannot, they cannot materialize their threats” — the press is already publishing this. This dispatch quotes him, “Can there be something more farfetched than allowing this mad woman to talk about transition at this particular time.” This phrase is not a spur of the moment statement; it is not an emotional outburst, this phrase carries a deep conviction based on facts that they cannot make true their threats. Not only are they unable to apply them militarily, they cannot because they do not have the support, the legitimacy, they do not have the minimal ground on which to fabricate a pretext against Cuba and obtain a minimum of support from their own public opinion or the world’s, because it was the Bush administration, precisely this administration, which took advantage of September 11 to carry out the plans they had made long before; all this was discovered later.

The decision to invade Iraq, the decision to proclaim, “He who is not with me is against me”, the decision to launch the doctrine and military theory of pre-emptive strikes against 60 or more countries, all of it was thought of before, not by Bush of course, because he cannot think that much, but by his close collaborators, fascist hawks, who had been scheming and producing a document named Project for the New American Century with their vision of a 21st Century that was theirs, because they were the only superpower, they had won the Cold War and now the world had to kneel down before them.

This document is the philosophy, the foundation doctrine that lay in waiting for the right moment; then came September 11th and they found their opportunity. They took advantage of the feelings of international sympathy, of the feelings of fear the American people had and then they rode the wave to carry out a number of things which had been agreed on long before. Such things were not at all the angry and mistaken replies to the terrorist act of 9-11, but the implementation of a previously drawn-up plan.

This was the year when their crimes and tortures were exposed; tortures, inhuman and degrading treatments. These are things forbidden by the UN Conventions, but publicly defended by Bush, Cheney and Condoleezza Rice.

She traveled to Europe to lie and say that they do not torture, while the TV screens showed the men who were kidnapped and moved from one continent to another with a hood on their heads, the men who bore on their backs the evidence of the beatings they received, the men who told the stories of how they were hung by their feet, the same tortures we heard about in this room when we held the Conference on Terrorism and talked about Operation Condor, an operation they organized, the men hung by their feet and submerged in water tanks to the verge of drowning, hung by their extremities until they fainted, the most degrading tortures, lascivious sexual abuse of the prisoners. The world saw images and films of all these things. We even heard confessions and stories told by those who had the courage to speak out after suffering the tragedy.

In the third place, these people were the creators of the arms race, they are its leaders; they revised the United States Nuclear Strategy and established that they could use nuclear weapons even against a country which did not have these weapons; they are the ones who develop and improve nuclear weapons and invest more money on nuclear weapons; they have spread the idea that to be safe you need to have nuclear weapons, because they are the leaders of such doctrine, the ones who have spent the most: over 500 billion dollars in military expenses in only one year.

They also invaded Iraq illegally, and once there they handed out the contracts for reconstruction to their buddies, to the ones who contributed money for their campaigns; they talk about capitalism and free enterprise, but they deal out the contracts to their cronies, to their closer friends. This is the truth. They have lost authority in the world. There is a feeling that to appear publicly by their side is in bad taste. Their allies do it because they have no choice. They walked out of the Kyoto Protocol and blew to pieces the idea of stopping the emissions of contaminating gases to protect the ozone layer. They want to exploit even the protected zones in Alaska to get oil, and thus serve the interests of their friends and the lobbyists who support their campaigns.

They passed and supported the implementation of the PATRIOT Act — ironically calling “patriotic” a law that in fact curtails the rights and freedom of their citizens, that authorized espionage, that authorized the dismantling of many people’s rights that had been conquered during long years of struggle for civil rights in the United States.

It is now known that they authorized and carried out telephone espionage, illegally, in violation of the United States laws; they have applied discriminating measures against immigrants and are now planning to apply new and more shameful measures. In a country that was made up of immigrants and needs them to do the jobs the local population does not do; a regime that gagged the press in a way unseen before, that harassed and jailed a journalist who refused to reveal his sources, a regime that put pressure to shut down the Al Jazeera channel in Iraq and shut it down because it did not want Al Jazeera’s independent views of what was happening in Iraq to be in the news. Why didn’t they? Because they lie to their people and try to give an image of normalcy to a war in which they are bogged down: a war in which more than 2000 young people have died senselessly. This is the truth.

Bush talked over the phone to Tony Blair and told him he was going to bomb Al Jazeera; this information was leaked to the media in London and they have tried to deny it, to say it was just a joke. The Qatar government demanded an explanation, Al Jazeera demanded an explanation. There was a wave of indignation in the Arab world. But their reaction to all this was the same as with the question of “How did Posada Carriles enter the United States?” Silence! As Compañero Fidel said yesterday, their solution is silence; they can’t find anything to say.

They discussed bombing Al Jazeera and they take other journalists on their tanks and armored vehicles to get them to publish what they want said; they applied censorship. Moreover, it is now known that they pay government money to journalists for positive articles, for lies about what is happening in Iraq. And they are trapped there, they occupied the country, they have had 170,000 soldiers there, but now they cannot control it.

A well-informed source told us, “during the day they come out, drive around, and more or less have control; but at night it’s the guerrillas who are in control, the fighters that are emerging, and there is talk of 30,000 combatants in the resistance against the occupying troops”. In the United States the debate is whether this is a new Viet Nam. This is the truth.

They developed the theory of pre-emptive war and have tried to apply it; the “whoever is not with me is against me and therefore if I suspect he might attack me, I will attack him first”.

They protect Posada, while they torture our Five Heroes. They have made the rich richer in the United States and the poor poorer.

A government with so little morality, a government that was voted out of the UN Commission for Human Rights, when the vote was secret, because of its lack of authority — and this happened when all these things I mentioned were not yet known — and to return to the Commission for Human Rights they had to speak to Aznar and Berlusconi so that Spain and Italy did not participate and the number of candidates would then be equal to the number of vacancies so the US could return. Thanks to the efforts and denunciations of many Third World countries, among which Cuba has played an important role, the future structure and character of the Council for Human Rights is presently under discussion. It will take the place of the Commission which has lost all prestige. In this immoral committee of double standards, of hypocrisy, where we have witnessed the level of moral and ethical degradation reached by not only the Bush administration, but also by the governments in the European Union who have been accomplices; the European politicians who have suffered the embarrassment in front of the world when a week ago it was disclosed that there were CIA clandestine prisons in Europe where detainees were tortured and interrogated in silence and taken from one country to another in Eastern Europe; clandestine flights carrying drugged and gagged men.

All this was made known in Europe; there was a huge public opinion scandal. Condoleezza Rice traveled there and met with the European Union Ministers of Foreign Affairs, with all 25 of them, and all 25 left the meeting saying, “We are satisfied, she has explained, we have understood her explanations, we trust her, we believe what we have been told.”

But as some sort of Divine Punishment, Colin Powell — who had been Secretary of State when those things were happening — went live on television, — he used this phrase, “They are nothing but Pharisees, because they all knew what was happening there.”

All these denunciations were simply filed away and then the Europeans come and say they are concerned about the situation in Cuba. They join the Yankees because they lack the courage and the ethics to defend their standing; because they are strategic allies — lesser allies, but followers of this gendarme who sometimes puts them in a difficult position, and sometimes embarrasses them, but who nonetheless is the guarantor of the present world order that we fight against.

This is why they harass us, because they profit from this world order together with the superpower and fear that one day this world order might change; an order that allows them to squander, to contaminate while on the other hand there are one billion people suffering prevalent hunger, 800 million illiterate people, and all the things we know. This is the unfair world order

they imposed — because it was the metropolis that imposed it, and the United States is the keeper of its continuity — and we fight against it. This is why they harass us.

Cuba is a threat for the Bush administration, this is true, but it is not a military threat, it is not a threat to its national security. Cuba is a threat because of its example, it is a moral and ethical threat, because Cuba shows that they can be challenged and defeated, because Cuba represents the possibility of a better world.

Third World countries see Cuba as an example. We must accept this with modesty, as we always do; but let us not forget that to vote with Cuba in the United Nations, countries have to defy the pressures and the blackmail of the United States, and there are countries who pay their affiliation fees —which they can barely afford — so they can vote in the United Nations with Cuba.

The first act of the government of East Timor in its history as an independent country in the United Nations was to go there and vote against the blockade to Cuba, the very first time it voted in the United Nations. And there are many more, countless examples that have been mentioned before.

So when we say the present U.S. regime has no authority, has no moral authority; when we say it is defeated, we mean it is defeated in a moral-ethical sense, because of the opinion that prevails about them in the world and within the United States. Not because we say so, we say so because it is true, because we can prove it; because we do not say anything that we cannot prove. But it is not only us. This is an article signed by former President Carter. *“This Isn’t the Real America”* is the title of the article which he published breaking an unwritten code in US politics according to which former presidents avoid talking about or criticizing acting presidents. And the shame and disgust is very strong in this man that we met here in Cuba, a man who has ethical feelings and a vision of the world, and notwithstanding that he was once President of the adversary power that has tried to destroy us, we understand and set him apart from the man who is presently in the White House.

He wrote things such as these:

“In recent years, I have become increasingly concerned by a host of radical government policies that now threaten many basic principles espoused by all previous administrations, Democratic and Republican.”

“These include the rudimentary American commitment to peace, economic and social justice, civil liberties, our environment and human rights.”

“Also endangered are our historic commitments to provide citizens with truthful information, treating dissenting voices and beliefs with respect, state and local autonomy and fiscal responsibility.”

“Instead of our tradition of espousing peace as a national priority unless our security is directly threatened, we have proclaimed a policy of ‘preemptive war’, an unabridged right to attack other nations unilaterally to change an unsavory regime or for other purposes. When there are serious differences with other nations, we brand them as international pariahs and refuse to permit direct discussions to resolve disputes.

“Regardless of the costs, there are determined efforts by top U.S. leaders to exert American imperial dominance throughout the world”.

Who is he talking about here? Of Bush, of Rumsfeld, of Condoleezza, of Cheney.

“...our declaration of ‘You are either with us or against us!’ has replaced the forming of alliances based on a clear comprehension of mutual interests...”

“...we now find civil liberties and personal privacy grossly violated...”

These are not our words, they are Carter’s.

“Of even greater concern is that the U.S. has repudiated the Geneva accords and espoused the use of torture in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay”

“It is embarrassing to see the president and the vice president insisting that the CIA should be free to perpetrate ‘cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment’ on people in U.S. custody.”

“Instead of reducing America’s reliance on nuclear weapons and their further proliferation, we have insisted on our right (and that of others) to retain our arsenals and expand them, and therefore abrogate or derogate almost all nuclear arms control agreements negotiated during the last 50 years. We have now become a prime culprit in global nuclear proliferation.”

Not only did they give arms to the apartheid regime of [South Africa] to be used against our combatants there, not only have they supported and assisted Israel to become one of the leading nuclear powers, but also they have replenished their own stockpiles...; While they try to prevent Iran from building nuclear plants and develop — as they have the right to do according to international laws — their capacity to produce nuclear fuel for peaceful uses.

“Protection of the environment has fallen by the wayside because of government subservience to political pressure from the oil industry and other powerful lobbying groups.”

“The last five years have brought ... almost universal condemnation of our nation’s global environment policies.”

“Members of Congress have increased their own pay — says Carter — by \$30,000 per year since freezing the minimum wage [in the United States] at \$5.15 per hour (the lowest among industrialized nations)”

And so on and so forth his criticisms which prove and reinforce our arguments,

This former President of the United States went to New York a few weeks ago; he went to the United Nations to take part as a guest in the negotiations — I’m going to call them negotiations, a real battlefield there where Third World countries have stood their ground and resisted successfully so far, although the battle is not over — against the attempts of the United States to turn the future Council for Human Rights into a tool to harass countries and justify aggressions.

Former President Carter met with the participants and they say that, suddenly and to the surprise of many present, in his final remarks he used 5 minutes to talk about Cuba and he said that his experience in Cuba was exceptional, that he found in Cuba a country that guarantees full employment, a country where children go to school and has a high level of instruction; that in his many trips around the world he has seen the dedication of Cuban doctors saving lives and fighting AIDS in Africa — seen them with his own eyes; that in no circumstances did Cuba deserve the treatment it received in Geneva, particularly when at the Committee for Human Rights they did not want to discuss what is happening in Guantanamo.

The Yankees don't want the vote for members of the Council to be secret. When the vote is secret, Cuba has no problems. For example, this year Cuba was elected member of the Social and Economic Council of the United Nations.

The United States sent three ambassadors, three diplomatic torturers to twist arms, to threaten countries with taking away World Bank aid if they voted for Cuba; but as the vote was secret, Cuba got 154 votes and was elected with more than two thirds of possible votes as a member of the Economic and Social Council.

And so for this Council for Human Rights that will be created, the United States demanded — a demand received by general laughter and mocking — that the vote be public and not secret, so that they can see how each country votes.

Let us remember that the vote against the blockade is public, the vote against the blockade to Cuba is public in the Assembly; but elections in the United Nations are by secret vote, and therefore Cuba gets elected and re-elected, because the countries vote in secret. In the hour of truth we get the votes even from their allies. They first wanted the future Council for Human Rights to be smaller; that instead of 53 members it should only have 25. Why? So that Third World countries could not be elected, because the task requires money for management, for officials and embassies.

Then they demanded that the vote be public, public! So they could put pressure, twist arms and turn screws so that people would vote for them.

Is this the empire that pretends to “change the regime” — as they put it — in Cuba? Is this the empire that pretends to defeat the Revolution? An empire with no moral authority? Not only do they lack moral authority, they also lack the strength to occupy our country; they cannot occupy our country.

They now talk about withdrawing 9,000 soldiers from Iraq to appease those who say, “What are we doing there? When are we leaving?” Because among the American soldiers fallen in Iraq there is not a single son of a politician or a millionaire, “Who are there? The sons of poor families who hope for the reward of college studies.

The 500,000 university students in Cuba do not have to take part in any unjust and illegal war, they do not have to go as mercenaries to any country to occupy its cities. They get their education as a right conquered by the resistance of their parents and the preceding generations, the right to go to a university. But in the United States they have to become soldiers, and every

week there is a new mother crying over the photo of her son or daughter; I saw a mother saying that the aspiration of her son was to go to college; or get the permanent residency or citizenship in the United States. So they then joined a mercenary army, like Rome and its legions in the decadence of the Roman Empire; this is what we are seeing. We should not underestimate it, because it has resources, strength, power; but we must not fear it. In fact we do not fear it, because it cannot defeat us.

When our Commander-in-Chief said here, “This is unbelievable, can there be something more far-fetched?” he said it because it is a fact, they cannot. And this Assembly [Parliament meeting] is a challenge, this public Assembly watched by millions of compatriots and open to the press is a challenge; it is the little defiant island telling them, “You cannot, you cannot do what you say you will do to us; you have lost your strategic battle against Cuba; Cuba is a symbol and you cannot do what you want, not even if you try; but you are not going to try.” And that is the challenge of the little country that stands its ground and does not move back, does not sell itself, does not surrender, does not get tired and, therefore, cannot be defeated; it is not divided and cannot be defeated.

There is much hatred underlying their threats and underlying the escalating rhetoric. And this is not only for electoral reasons or to keep the support of the Miami mafia, this is also the way they think. It is the hate of a corrupt oligarchy that reached the Presidency and their positions illegally and cannot defeat our example. And the more they do, the stronger is our resistance, and the better is our country overcoming its difficulties and facing the blockade and their threats.

And lastly, Commandante and compañeros, I would like to refer to the debate we’ve had here and the analysis we’ve made not only here these two days at the Assembly but also in the country — because it has become clear that there is an intense debate in the whole country particularly after your speech at the University. Ross [Pedro Ross is the Secretary General of the Trade Union Federation] said there is an intense debate — and Leonel also talked about it — in factories, in work centers. Lugo referred to debates in groups of farmers and agricultural cooperatives. There is an ongoing debate in the streets, in the neighborhoods. In other words, the debate is not just here at the Assembly, there is a popular debate all over the country.

I think it is important to remember that the Yankees bet on the idea — with a certain logic — that revolutions are cataclysmic events with an initial momentum and that with time they lose strength and languish. Based on the history of other revolutions they say, “Well, the longest one was the October Revolution, but after 70 years we defeated it and changed everything there.” That is, their idea is based on the illusive hope of tiredness.

As someone said here today —I think it was Leonel who said it — the question is that our Revolution has not undergone such a process. I am not intending to propose that next year be called the “Year of the 80th Anniversary”, but I do believe we must say that if such a thing has not happened it has been due first and foremost to the role of Fidel, our Commander-in-Chief (Applause). Then our Revolution is constantly renewed. As Gabriel García Márquez put it once: “*The explanation of Cuba is that Fidel is at the same time the Head of Government and the Leader of the Opposition*”; he is the main non-conformist, the strongest critic of our work, and

this gives uniqueness to our process. The enemy then bets on the idea that our Revolution will grow tired and be lost — as has happened before in history, because after the French Revolution there was a victorious counterrevolution and there were many other processes that were lost, they grew tired, they lost their course. But this has not been our case, and a long time has passed, more than four decades and this has not happened. Then that is the idea.

So we have come this far. The *Comandante* said yesterday, “We must look at our achievements only as a starting point”. What a way to see things! Meaning: let us not gloat on what we have achieved; let us not justify what we still have not done by talking about what we did, but rather let’s look ahead and take our accomplishments as a starting point. And this is a greater challenge when we are not really beginning, when 46 years have gone by since that initial foundational moment when the phrase “*This time the Mambises will enter Santiago*” was pronounced.

The fact that we have resisted all these years, as we have indeed struggled and resisted, is in itself no guarantee that the future will be victorious, because our patriots in the wars for independence battled and fought for 30 years, they won the admiration of the world and the public opinion in the United States, and in the end, divided, tired, discouraged, betrayed, they saw the imposition of the Platt Amendment and the appointment of a U.S. Governor that turned Cuba into a neo colony of the United States.

I mean that the idea of having resisted for a long time does not guarantee the survival of a revolution. We have the painful example of the Soviet Union; a people that fought courageously, that lost 20 million sons and daughters during the Second World War, that was able to defeat fascism, but was later defeated and disarmed without firing a single shot. Past successes in the struggle do not justify self-complacency or the idea that victory is won for eternity.

We are faced with a challenge. Since 1990 when the Special Period started, the young people who were then children of 10 — more or less a million and a half Cuban children were around 10 years old in 1990 — have become adults in these 15 years and have known a country different from the one the revolution built and the people brought forward until the Special Period began. It was not exactly the country we wanted, but the one we could build, overcoming all the difficulties we know. This million and a half young people are accompanied by another million young people who have been reaching adolescence in the last 10 years and have lived in a society where the vices and negative tendencies Compañero Fidel denounced in his speech at the University flourished; they did not grow up in a country where everyone has been receiving according to his work, they have lived in times when our country has witnessed tendencies toward individualism, to every man for himself. This has not done away with the merit of collective resistance; with the fact that this people has resisted here when 35% of our GDP disappeared in little less than four years, when our imports fell from 8 500 million dollars a year to 1 500, when our calorie intake dropped from 3 000 to less than 2 000 calories a day; when our country had to face those years in a feat yet to be told and recorded; a feat that must never be forgotten in the history of this nation and of this hemisphere.

When all that passed, however, some vices and negative practices set in, many of which compañero Fidel denounced at the university and called upon us to meet them head-on.

Therefore, we have a challenge in these young people who have more information and more consumer expectations than the young people who at the beginning of the Revolution carried out the Literacy Campaign; because at the beginning of the Revolution going to school or getting free medical assistance were extraordinary privileges never attained before. But for the young people today these things are given rights and they don't stop to wonder where they come from or how they are made possible; and I'm sure that when some of you, compañeras and compañeros, try to discuss these things with them they say, "Oh, come on, don't give me that same old story about public health and education."

The most expensive things in the world. The dream of many in other countries; so many families making economies hoping they can pay for their childrens' studies; and families asking Cuba for help, because a relative is going to die and they cannot afford an operation.

Why in Venezuela, a country with such vast resources, a country that exports 3 million barrels of oil per day, have we operated, in just one and a half year, on more than 170,000 Venezuelans with eyesight problems? Why did more than 150,000 Venezuelans come this year to Cuba to recover their sight, people from such a rich country, from a country with more than enough resources and money? How come we have to plan to perform eye operations on millions of blind Latin Americans?

In Cuba, full generations — let us remember that 7 out of every 10 Cubans were born after the blockade was already in place — have seen these rights as something natural.

In other countries you hear people say, "We are saving money to see if we can pay for our childrens' education, because the university..."; but not here, university studies, housing... It is true that we have housing problems, but those who have a house either own it or pay an insignificant rent; in the rest of the world, as an average, rent takes half a person's income, it is always a concern to be able to pay rent, and people dream of becoming owners of their house, just as it was in Cuba before the Revolution. But what happens? Well, these things are frequently forgotten, they are not discussed, they are not brought to debate.

We have a challenge here, and it is the fact that a certain historical memory has been lost, a certain comparison and information on what is going on in the world has been lost.

During the meetings we held in numerous schools and campuses we met many young people who lack knowledge of these matters. Of course, this is not only in young people, this is in all generations; but well, young people have had less experience in life and have less information; less information to compare what was Cuba before the Special Period.

But journalists that are friends of Cuba, people on the left who visit our country, have told us they are amazed to see the level of naiveté they find in some Cubans who have a wrong idea of capitalism and think it is a bed of roses, people who believe they emigrate and once there everything is easy, who think that the destiny of Cuba —after the Yankees come with blood and fire — is the destiny of a developed capitalist European country, and do not realize that the destiny would be that of Haiti or the Dominican Republic; of a poor Third World country that the United States would turn into a neo colony. Not to mention that in Miami there are still those who demand three days with license to kill, because they think that with the Yankee troops this

will be a stroll in the park, and they fail to realize that here they will have to come and get us one by one and grab us by the muzzle of our guns if they can, and we'll see if in Cuba they can pull off a transition to an American colony.

I believe we must pay close attention to the call made by Fidel at the university; to the phrase never said publicly before in the history of the Revolution: The Revolution can be reversed, and not by the enemy who has done everything in its power to do it, but by our own errors if we are not capable of facing, fighting and defeating internal mistakes and dangers.

We must not ignore and should not underestimate the fact that within our ranks, in the midst of our people, there is simulation, apathy, boredom. A while ago, the President of FEU [University Students Federation] said, "We must stop and consider why frequently there is no repulse to crime, to offences; how there has been a degree of impunity and slackness that allows coexistence with things that are basically crimes." There is a number of factors that have to do not only with the shortages we have endured but also with the lack of convictions; because during the preparation for the assault on Moncada [reference to an action in the Revolutionary war] the participants went hungry and with holes in their shoes, while they had money in their pockets, but they would not touch it, not even to buy medicine for their children.

Therefore, there are lessons in ethics. Marti prepared the necessary war and refused to let his colleagues buy him a pair of shoes to replace his old worn ones.

There are many examples, and every day we find examples in our people, and the biggest example is the collective result that allows for us to be here today discussing these things and making plans and having dreams for the future. But we must not forget that socialism disappeared in the East European countries where there was a high level of material quality of life and socialism there was defeated overnight.

Today I read a dispatch saying that Hungary will reach this year the same living standards it had in 1972, and this is with European money; I think they have been promised around 3 billion a year starting now.

This has been a great year, a year of victories. I'm sure many of us will never forget these days when we have enjoyed so many things, and, above all, when we dream and see all the good things to come, the things we'll be able to do, in fact things that are not utopian dreams, that are realities, when they tell us, "And all this is already signed, all these things have already been shipped to us and many are already in our warehouses," In other words, the idea that there is going to be a great improvement in many of the things we do, that our standard of living is going to be better, that there will be a better quality of life for this people that has put up an exemplary resistance through all these years of blockade and struggle.

In the early 90's, in the United Nations, foreign diplomats began to bid farewell to our representatives offering their condolences, "Well, we know your country will run the same fate as the others". And they said farewell with admiration and grief. But the little island stood proud with its flag in the wind and there was no way to defeat it or suffocate it by hunger or diseases.

This has been an enlightening debate, and we will have to continue thinking about it.

We have reached military invulnerability. This has been stated with all the authority of those in a position to say so.

We will reach economic invulnerability. Last night we discussed here what is meant by reaching economic invulnerability even if we remain under blockade.

We must also fight — I humbly believe — to preserve ideological and political invulnerability, which is not a problem now; now we have it because we still have the generation that made the Revolution, we have Fidel and Raul.

Even our enemies are aware of this and in their plans they accept the fact that there is nothing much they can do while Fidel and Raul are around, there is no way. But they base their hopes on the fact that the ones who come after them can be misled, defeated, divided, bought or subjected.

Military invulnerability is a goal achieved; economic invulnerability is a goal yet to be achieved but clearly attainable, it has been shown here; political and ideological invulnerability is something we have now, but it will need to be preserved when we no longer have that voice that alerts when others are unaware, when we no longer have the eyes that see what others have not made out — because as Marti said, politics is foreseen — when there is no longer the incarnation of the idea that victory is possible, because if you do not believe in it you cannot attain it.

Around this time next year, we'll be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the landing of the *Granma yacht*. 50 years ago they were a group of men arranging the expedition in Mexico, hungry, persecuted and getting ready to make a dream come true.

Now, we are a people in power, we have a victorious Revolution, but we cannot preserve socialism in our country simply because it is so proclaimed in our constitution. The constitution proclaimed a conviction, but in practical facts it has to be defended every single day. In the Soviet Union a referendum showed that 85% did not want the country to be disintegrated, — eighty five percent! And six months later a group of men there decided —on a stormy night, it is said — to disintegrate it; and then you know what happened. And we were left alone, and here we are.

We must know how to preserve our victorious Revolution in the future, when there is that space that no one can fill and will have to be filled by all of us as one people, because in the history of a country events like these are not repeated and because the role of personality in history is a fact and it is not just the sum of quantitative changes bringing about qualitative changes, there is also the role of leadership that sees much further than others, that catalyzes, that contributes to create conditions based on audacity and more audacity, because a conservative analysis affirmed that there could not be a Revolution in Cuba, but the attack on the Moncada garrison and the generous death of dozens of brave young men created the conditions, with leadership and the coming of a new generation. And the *Granma*, a military defeat on arrival, did not promise precisely the victory won two years later by a small army of the same young men who were later joined by farmers, workers and ordinary people.

Therefore, an essential topic now— one that has been hovering over this Assembly — is that the enemy has hopes to defeat us not right now, but later; and that springs from the idea that it cannot defeat the historic generation.

This is a time when we celebrate the Anniversary of the Revolution, the end of a year, these great, historic days for our people and our Assembly; these are not days to evoke sad news or bring about subjects one prefers not to think of; but we must all know that the plans the enemy nurtures, the plans we have rejected today and this Assembly have again told the enemy to his face that it cannot fulfill them, are real plans, not just propaganda. They are plans the enemy would like to carry out if it could. The thing is it has not been able to, but it is willing to try and probably will try to carry them out.

Therefore, I think there are three basic premises: the first is that this Revolution cannot be defeated if those who lead it do so on the basis of the authority of their personal example, as is the case today, as has always been the case. The Revolution has come this far in the first place due to the moral authority of its leadership. You can have the power but no authority, and this is the case of Bush and his regime, because the authority does not stem from given attributes, it stems from the example of a person's acts. The way we understand such authority is like this, "Well, I do not understand it very well, but if Fidel said so, I'm sure it is like that".

There are so many people among us who say, "If Fidel said so, he knows; we'll understand in time." Such value, such treasure; or this other one, "If Fidel said so, it is because it is true, because Fidel speaks clearly to the people." Countless times have we seen and heard things like this. Such treasure must not be lost: the authority that grows from personal example.

This is why Fidel said during the process of rectification — which unfortunately was interrupted because the objectives were just outlined when the Special Period set in and many of the aims could not be pursued at the time — he said, "Socialism is the science of exemplarity."

And now, as I see that in this Assembly we talked about building 100,000 new homes next year, in spite of the blockade and all the obstacles, I realize we rescued many of those projects; with more experience now and on more solid and better foundations.

Legitimacy based on authority; authority based on personal example.

For as long as this country has a leadership based on personal example, on the authority which emanates from austere behavior, from dedication to work, from the knowledge our people have that those who lead have no privileges other than those of serving more and sacrificing more, that their families live no differently from the families of the people, that their children receive the same education the children of the workers receive, that in our country we do not allow corruption and fight against it — and punish it all the harder, the higher is he who makes the mistake or consents or betrays or becomes corrupted. For as long as this country preserves the treasure it has enjoyed so far, that made an entire country close ranks and heroically resist the empire for more than four decades, for as long as it keeps it, it will be invincible. This is the first premise.

The second premise is that for as long as we have the support of the great majority of the people as we do today, not based on material consumption, but based on ideas and convictions — because I already referred to the peoples in the socialist countries that were disarmed and did not come out in the streets to fight when their future was being dismantled. On the other hand, we did see the poor people in Venezuela come out in the streets to fight for the return of Chávez when the Yankees orchestrated the oligarchic and military coup d'état. The destitute took to the streets, and most of those who joined the Rebel Army owned nothing, they were farmers and poor workers; in other words, support must be based on ideas and convictions; it is wrong to think that people will support us more because they have more.

Of course there has been an erosion, and there are people who say, “All these years have gone by, I'm already this old, I only have so many years left, are things always going to be like this, the blackouts, the lack of transportation?” There are those who get tired, the ones who emigrate and say, “Well, I'm leaving. Good-bye.” Worse than these are those who betray, who go to the enemy to tell stories and lie, to say what they ask them to tell. But there are some who simply abandon the collective effort, abandon the epic task because they have other interests; and there are the ones — let us not be naïve — who think likewise but have not yet acted and just pretend, but they are not the majority. We have the support of the absolute majority of the people, because if we didn't we wouldn't be here, we wouldn't have been able to resist the empire. To have the support of the absolute majority means that this absolute majority shares, as it has up to now, the convictions and ideas of the project. This is a battle of ideas.

The Revolution cannot survive without the support of the people; and this does not mean it couldn't be made all over again; but it would be hard to see the defeat of a Revolution that has been preserved, that has accomplished the historical deed of surviving here. This we all know, and today we have ratified to the Chief of the Revolution that we will defend it.

Lastly, the third premise which I think is essential. We must not be naïve. In the end the decisive question is who receives the income: either the majority and the people, or the oligarchic, transnational and pro-Yankee minority. In the end, the question is who owns the property: the people, the majority or the corrupt minority on its knees before the interests of the only world gendarme who could guarantee such privileges in Cuba: Yankee imperialism

In Cuba, there cannot be a national patriotic bourgeoisie as other countries had; in Cuba, the bourgeoisie always was, and would again be if we let it emerge, pro-Yankee, pro-transnational, and would need the rural guards, and the army of Batista, and the Yankee marines, to repress and subdue the people.

In the end, who can guarantee that it is the majority who enjoy most of the income and own most of the property? Only the Socialist State.

And the day when the enemy manages — but it will not manage — to dismantle the Socialist State defeating the Revolution, we will lose — as we heard here yesterday — not only the Revolution and the state, but also the nation. Because Cuba would be absorbed, Cuba would become a municipality of Miami.

This is outlined in Bush's plan. This is what our country faces: the historic alternative to once again preserve its triumph, to improve its socialism, to change what has to be changed within the ideas of socialism and loyalty to its principles, or the different road that made others unable to declare on a day like this that they live in a free country. Imperfect as all human work is, perfectible with everybody's toil; but a country where one is proud to live in, a country which when you state you are Cuban you get a phrase of encouragement and admiration; a country that does not force its nationals to go around the world with their heads hung down in embarrassment, a country that does not force its diplomats to justify crimes or ideas that are not based on principles, a country that has never placed a diplomat in the situation of having to explain an idea it does not share, a country where theory, principles and practice are the same thing.

This has great value, because this has only happened a few times, and always for short periods, in the history of other peoples. This is what our people have at stake.

And if more arguments were needed — not by us here present because we don't need them — more arguments, more convictions to defend these ideas with passion and to be ready to fight and die for them, I believe that these days that started quietly with the speech at the university and have continued now with much more awareness in our people, these days have given us still more arguments and convictions to feel proud and modestly walk the way with Compañero Fidel, with Compañero Raúl, with the historic generation of the Revolution, with our leaders, admired and beloved for their personal history and their contribution to the Revolution all these years. And we are certain that our people will have the maturity, the ideas, the morale, the unity and the strength to preserve the work of the Revolution and pass on to our children a country better still than the one they have defended and preserved for us. (Exclamations of “¡Viva Fidel!” and “¡Viva Cuba libre!”)

Ovation

Socialist Voice #79, January 28, 2006

A Unique Resource for Marxists in Canada; Socialist History Project Documents a Century of Struggle

By John Riddell

“Over the past 100 years, socialists in Canada and Québec have written a vast amount on the political issues they considered important, but virtually none of those writings are available today. The experiences, ideas, analyses, and insights of a century of socialism are in danger of being forgotten and lost forever.”

With those words, the **Socialist History Project** (SHP) was launched by Ian Angus, author of the path-breaking history of the early Communist Party, *Canadian Bolsheviks*. The main goal of the project, he said, was to recover key socialist articles, pamphlets, speeches, and documents from obscurity, and make them universally available on the World Wide Web.

That was in June 2004. A year and a half later, the SHP website has grown to include literally hundreds of documents. The expanding collection covers the years 1900 to 1980, including histories, reviews, reminiscences, and tributes, as well as a host of articles and statements written in the heat of the struggle. The project acknowledges donations and assistance from a wide range of individuals representing many divergent socialist currents.

While there is still much more to be added, the *www.socialisthistory.ca* website has become a unique and valuable resource for socialists, documenting a century of Marxist insight into the key issues facing the working class and its allies in this country.

This is particularly important because the history of the Canadian left, especially after World War II, has not been well studied or reported, either by professional historians or by socialists themselves. And the mainstream media, when they mention the radicalism of the sixties and seventies at all, trivialize it as countercultural or adventurist or both. As a result, it has been all but impossible for the new generation of radicals to learn from the achievements (or the mistakes) of the past.

Two waves of revolutionary socialism

The online collection shows that there were two large waves of revolutionary socialism in Canada, two periods in which the Marxist left has won significant support and built significant organizations. The first began about 1901 and reached its peak in the 1920s with the formation and rapid growth of the Communist Party of Canada. That promising beginning was cut short at the end of that decade by the triumph of Stalinism in the Communist International and the expulsion from the Communist movement of all those who supported the policies the International had followed when Lenin was alive.

The second wave began in 1960, with the creation of a stable, national Trotskyist organization, the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière, an organization of considerable political sophistication and a wide range of achievement. The LSA/LSO and its youth group, the

Young Socialists/Ligue des Jeunes Socialistes, played a central role in the radicalization that swept Canada and Québec the 1960s and 1970s. The movement reached its greatest size and influence as the Revolutionary Workers League, product of the fusion of the LSA/LSO and two other groups in 1977.

But the RWL did not survive the ebb in radical activity and labor militancy in the early 1980s: it fell into decline and suffered several debilitating splits. Of the currents that came out of the RWL, Socialist Voice is the only one that today manages to maintain a regular Canada-based publication.

Today Marxism in Canada and Québec has entered a new wave of development. After an extended period of downturn, there are clear signs of revival of workers' struggles internationally and, to a lesser extent, in Canada. Marxist forces, while still small, are well positioned to play a leading role in coming struggles.

It is those revolutionary forces – both individuals and groups – that will find the greatest benefit in the materials now made available through the Socialist History Project. While history never repeats itself exactly, many experiences and insights from the past are directly relevant today. Some examples:

LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY: Supporters of the movements for change in Venezuela and Bolivia have much to learn from the campaigns led by socialists in the 1960s to explain and defend the Cuban revolution. The pamphlets produced by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee are particularly good examples of the ways to bring the truth about an anti-imperialist revolution to a Canadian audience.

THE NDP: In the 1970s, Canadian Marxists undertook an in-depth analysis of the “NDP problem” – what policy socialists should adopt towards this large pro-capitalist party with strong links to the labor movement. The issues they confronted then are still with us today, and reading SHP's recently posted selection of documents from that debate may help us avoid political pitfalls and errors that have already been carefully examined.

QUEBEC: The greatest weakness of the revolutionary socialists in the first wave was their failure to understand the national oppression of Quebec and support Quebec's right to self-determination. Documents on the SHP website show how socialists in the 1960s and 1970s decisively corrected that failing. In addition to documenting their political analysis of Quebec, the site features an impressive collection of articles that illustrate the role socialists played in defending Quebec when Trudeau imposed the War Measures Act in 1970. It also features two outstanding analyses of the growth of the revolutionary left in Quebec by Francois Moreau and Bernard Rioux, in both the original French text and in fine English translations by Richard Fidler.

And there is much more, including sections on the antiwar movement, women's liberation, gay liberation, and First Nations.

An understanding of the successes and failures the previous generations of Marxists in Canada is essential to charting our course today. And that is good reason to support and use the growing library of materials available at the Socialist History website.

Spread the word!