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Socialist Voice #126, October 2, 2006

## **Imperialized Canada or Canadian Imperialism?**

by **Bill Burgess**

*[Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from an important new study of the nature of Canadian capitalism.]*

Is Canada a colony of the United States, a dependent economy controlled by U.S. corporations? Are Canadian capitalists a weak and servile group with no real power? Should socialists focus their efforts on winning Canadian "independence" from the Yankee behemoth?

Many on the Canadian left — especially in the NDP and the Communist Party — believe just that. They complain that Canadian capitalists don't defend Canadian sovereignty at home or pursue independent Canadian interests abroad. Imperialist war, private health care and more greenhouse gases are not really 'Canadian issues', they are ultimately 'made in the USA.'

That in turns leads them to the view that the left should focus its main fire on the U.S., not on Canadian capitalists. In some cases they argue that we should ally ourselves with "progressive" sectors of the Canadian bourgeoisie to bolster Canadian sovereignty as a necessary first step towards other progressive changes. This view guided much of the opposition to 'free' trade with the US over the past two decades.

This "left-wing nationalism" became particularly influential in English Canada in the 1960s and 1970s, and it still exerts a powerful influence on progressive thought. Groups such as the Council of Canadians, headed by Maude Barlow, argue that Canada's growing political and economic integration with the U.S. is the most important political question today. Readers of Barlow's recent book, *Too Close For Comfort*, will find no mention of a Canadian capitalist class with its own capacity to act and its own motives for acting the way it does. Barlow's Canada is controlled by US corporations and right-wing Republicans.

Barlow's readers would never guess that 22 of the 25 largest enterprises in the country are Canadian-controlled. Ten rich families control ten of these largest enterprises. Another two are government enterprises, and ten are more widely-owned. Only three of the top 25 enterprises are US-controlled.

Wealthy Canadians have clearly not been displaced as the primary economic decision-makers in this country. Nationalists therefore resort to the myth that Canadian capital is so divided along sectoral lines and integrated with US capital that the Canadian ruling class lacks independent interests at home and abroad. The facts actually reveal strong links between Canadian financial and industrial corporations. As for the links between foreign and Canadian corporations in Canada — they are conspicuous by their absence.

And isn't it time to admit how wrongheaded the nationalist economic perspective has been? Robert Laxer wrote in 1973 that, "The theory of deindustrialization as a consequence of imperial dominance will have more practical consequences for the future of jobs, economic security, and quality of life for Canadians than any single other explanatory concept on the Canadian horizon." Wrong. 33 years later Canada is still not qualitatively less industrially-developed than the U.S.

So-called "left nationalism" rests on assumptions about the Canadian economy that are demonstrably false. The simple truth is this: Canada is an independent imperialist country dominated by its own ruling class.

At every opportunity, nationalists highlight the US influence over Canada. Meanwhile they underestimate the role of the Canadian bourgeoisie, relying on economic myths for which the empirical evidence is negative. Canadian capitalists are closely allied with US capitalists, but from their own basis of power.

Canada's second rank relative to the US should not be confused with its imperialist status in the world system, which is rooted in a domestic economy controlled by independent Canadian finance capital.

Politics in Canada should begin with the mainly Canadian capitalist root of social ills at home and Canadian policy abroad.

Socialist Voice #127, October 3, 2006

## **Hugo Chavez Speaks on the Challenges Facing the Bolivarian Revolution Today**

**by Stuart Munckton**

*(Green Left Weekly, September 27, 2006)* In an exclusive interview with the September 10 Spanish-language daily *Diario Panorama*, Venezuela's socialist President Hugo Chavez spoke about the challenges facing the Bolivarian revolution — as the process of social transformation his government is leading is called.

Many of the gains of the revolution are well-known, with a growing number of social missions redistributing the nation's oil wealth and resulting in significant drops in poverty.

Revolutionaries inside Venezuela are pointing to the dangers of a strongly entrenched state bureaucracy that remains largely unchanged from before Chavez was elected that works to sabotage the process of change — in particular the transfer of power to the poor, a key stated aim of the revolution.

A number of this layer have joined the pro-Chavez camp for opportunist reasons. A number of self-proclaimed Chavistas in positions of power, referred to as “counter-revolutionaries in red berets,” are criticized by the popular movements for continuing the same bureaucratic and often corrupt practices as before the revolution. Chavez has been at the forefront of calling for moves to give more power to the poor, and has sacked a number of high-ranking public officials and ministers for failure to adequately tackle corruption.

Asked by *Diario Panorama* about the risks facing the revolution, Chavez stated: “The biggest threat is inside; there is a permanent, bureaucratic counterrevolution. I spend my time with a whip because all around me is the enemy of an old and new bureaucracy that is resisting change.” Chavez said that it was important to make sure policies are carried out and not “derailed or minimized by this bureaucratic counterrevolution that is inside the state.”

“The state has been transformed at a macro level,” Chavez explained, “but the micro levels remain intact. It is necessary to think about right now a new package of laws [to facilitate] the transformation of the political and judicial framework right down to the most micro levels of the state to overcome this resistance.

“The counterrevolution of corruption is the sister of the bureaucratic counterrevolution. This is another terrible threat, because it appears where you least expect it ... it is like a demon that has to be exorcised.” Chavez explained this is why, among the key strategic goals for the revolution to be fulfilled if Chavez, as is widely expected, is re-elected in December, is the development of a “socialist ethic.”

Chavez explained that the “other threat is external” to the revolution. “It continues to be assassination,” he said. Venezuela has repeatedly claimed to have evidence of US involvement in

plots to kill Chavez. "I am obliged to look after my life, not only for me but for the stability of the country."

On the possibility of another military coup, like the US-backed one that briefly ousted Chavez in April 2002, Chavez argued that "one can not rule out a manifestation of a group of discontent or bought-off soldiers, like the ones that let [Carlos] Ortega escape [a coup participant jailed for his role in sabotaging the economy who escaped from prison in August]." However, he argued "beyond that, a threat of a coup that breaks the foundations of the republic does not exist."

"Today the Armed Forces is firmly on the side of the revolution. The military structure of Venezuela has been transformed to a great extent."

On other potential threats, Chavez explained: "A US invasion can never be discarded, although I believe that the North American empire already has enough complications for it to go and get itself involved here."

Asked about whether he worried about an attempt to de-legitimize the electoral process via opposition forces withdrawing from the presidential elections (as they did with the National Assembly elections in December) Chavez said, "Yes, of course it is a worry. I am busy working to impede this plan, if they activate it, it will damage us."

"In Venezuela," Chavez argued, "we are dealing with a 'democratic' opposition that supports coups and does not recognize electoral results. They are now handicapped, because their methods are known throughout the world."

The Chavistas are seeking to gain as strong a mandate as possible to deepen the revolution by winning 10 million votes. With even the opposition's own polls showing Chavez set to win comfortably, the election is being presented as a referendum on the Chavez's stated aim of constructing "socialism of the 21st century."

Chavez commented, "I know that it is impossible to reach this figure, although that is where we are heading." Since Chavez was first elected in 1998, the numbers of people participating in presidential ballots, and casting votes for Chavez in particular, have increased as support for the revolution has grown. "We have come from 3.5 million votes in '98, 3.8 million in 2000 and we reached 6 million votes in 2004."

Chavez argued, "what is certain is that we have to win by a big margin. If they withdraw and call to abstain, and 4 million do not vote, we have to get 7 or 8 million votes in order to demonstrate our strength and neutralize the plans for destabilization [by claiming the vote was illegitimate]."

Asked whether he expected the leading opposition candidate, Manuel Rosales, to go through with standing for election, Chavez said: "I don't know if they will make it to the finish. We are dealing with people that do not keep to their word. No one can believe them. I would say that there is a 50% probability that they will stay until the end."

“The great tragedy of the opposition,” Chavez added, “is that the same old hulks that don’t want to die, should already be dead as parties, because they have nothing to say. The worst thing is that new parties of the opposition have allowed themselves to be absorbed by the old hulks.”

Chavez was asked about what should form the central axis of constitutional reform, an issue that is being publicly debated by different members of the government. The constitution adopted by referendum in 1999 is considered one of the major gains of the revolutionary process. It sets out a vision for society based on social justice and guarantees different sectors of the oppressed rights they never previously enjoyed.

However, the constitution, while including a clause that subordinates private property to social need, remains within the framework of capitalism, leading some to argue it should be reformed to better reflect the growing anti-capitalist direction of the revolution.

Chavez said, “The ’99 constitution was infiltrated by some counterrevolutionary interests, let’s remember the case of Luis Miquilena and Alfredo Pena.” Miquilena was a key adviser to Chavez in the early stages of his presidency. Pena was elected mayor of Caracas as a Chavez supporter. Both were moderates who joined the pro-capitalist opposition to Chavez when he introduced laws that affected the interests of the rich in 2001.

They had helped ensure that the initial economic policies of the Chavez government did not break decisively with neoliberalism. “In those days I had to firmly oppose many articles that attempted to leave things like they were.”

“We would have to revise the economic framework” of the constitution, Chavez said. “We have made economic achievements, but we have hardly impacted on the redistribution of the national rent. The poorest class has improved its income due to [increases in the] minimum salary [and the provision of] free health care, free schooling. That undoubtedly has been a relief, but the upper classes have also benefited [from economic growth] much more so.

“The gap between an enriched elite and the lower classes, instead of reducing, has grown. We have to revise this. For example, those from the banking sector have been the ones who have made the most money, [for whom] growth in the first semester of 2006 is 40%, that is billions of bolivares in profits, that has to be revised.

“In the political sphere, we need to revise the revolutionary democracy, elevate to the constitutional level the issue of power for the people, the communal councils, direct democracy and defence of the state.

“Many people told me, during the coup, that I should decree an emergency, but I don’t have the faculty, not even to intervene [on] a television station. An emergency does not give the state the ability to take extraordinary measures like were necessary on April 11 [2002], when uniformed generals came out on television stations calling for a rebellion in support of the coup.”

*Diario Panorama* asked Chavez what was going to be done about the housing crisis facing the poor. He explained: “We will shortly launch a new mission, named Villanueva [New Home]. For

example in Catia we have already located an area that is occupied by large sheds that we are going to acquire. If they belong to the state then occupy them; if they are private, expropriate them.” Chavez said private owners would be compensated for any expropriations.

“We will knock down those sheds and we will construct small buildings. We will bring down an entire neighbourhood. This is one part of Mission Villanueva. The second will be satellite cities, like the one we want to do in Maracaibo, facilitating its inhabitants” with public transport. Chavez explained that one possibility is that excess from Venezuela’s foreign reserves will be used to invest in a decade-long US\$2 billion per year housing plan.

Socialist Voice #128, October 9, 2006

## **Canada/NATO Invasion of Afghanistan Sows Destruction and Misery**

**By Roger Annis and Ian Beeching**

A few months following the launch of the Canada-led NATO invasion of southern Afghanistan in late 2005, the newly elected Prime Minister of Canada told assembled Canadian soldiers in Kandahar that the goal of the foreign occupation of Afghanistan was to “create a democratic, prosperous, modern country that can be a model in this part of the world.”

An October 6 editorial in the *Globe and Mail* national daily says the military defeat of the “Taliban” is “a superfluous sideshow to the real Canadian mission of painting schools and drilling wells.”

The reality in Afghanistan puts the lie to these stated goals. Occupation forces have brought widespread death, misery and destruction to the country. The invasion and occupation of southern Afghanistan is degenerating into a military and political debacle for the four countries engaged — Canada, Britain, the U.S. and Holland.

### **Senlis Council report**

On September 5, 2006, the Senlis Council, a prominent think tank based in Britain, released a comprehensive report on the U.S./NATO occupation of Afghanistan. It says, “Five years of international presence in the country aimed at increasing the living standards of the Afghan population have failed to make any measured improvements in the accessibility and quality of health and educational services in most of Afghanistan, beyond the confines of Kabul.”

The report was compiled by a large number of researchers based in Afghanistan and it reveals a country living a social and humanitarian disaster.

“Despite promises from the U.S.-led international community guaranteeing to provide the resources and assistance necessary for its reconstruction and development needs, Afghanistan’s people are starving to death. Afghanistan continues to rank at the bottom of most poverty indicators, and the situation of women and children is particularly grave. One in four children born in Afghanistan cannot expect to live beyond the age of five, and certain provinces of the country lay claim to the worst maternal mortality rates ever recorded in the world”

According to Senlis, more than 70% of the Afghan population is chronically malnourished, while less than a quarter has access to safe drinking water.

### **Human loss, social destruction**

The United Nations Development Program reports similar catastrophic conditions. It says the average life expectancy for the people of Afghanistan is 44 years, at least 20 years lower than in neighbouring Central Asian countries.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Commission on Refugees, Afghanistan had 2.9 million refugees in 2005. That number is growing as a result of foreign military operations.

The occupiers like to point to the region surrounding the capital city Kabul as proof of their accomplishments and good will. But progress there is as elusive as in Iraq's capital city, Baghdad. Open sewers line the streets. Rent for an intact home is too expensive for ordinary Afghans, forcing many to live in dilapidated and structurally unsound buildings. Residents of Kabul receive, at best, four hours of electricity a day.

Prison conditions in Afghanistan are reportedly worse than the horrors that came to light in the prisons of Iraq. According to a May 12 article in the *Globe and Mail*, six thousand prisoners were crowded into Afghanistan's 34 prisons at that time, a tenfold increase from the numbers incarcerated at the time of the fall of the Taliban-led government in 2001.

"As the Afghan court system expands, the prison population is rising sharply. Yet the jails are falling apart," the article explains.

A February 2005 story in the UK Guardian reported widespread Abu Ghraib-style abuse by U.S. forces against Afghan prisoners, including torture, taking 'trophy photographs' of detainees, and carrying out rape and sexual humiliation.

Earlier this year, Canada announced that it does not apply the Geneva Convention governing the treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan. It hands prisoners over to the existing prison system, thereby making Canadian soldiers accomplices to war crimes.

### **Failure to reconstruct**

Canada and NATO are failing to rebuild infrastructure with their "Provincial Reconstruction Teams." According to Senlis, "There is a large and increasing gap between the massive international expenditure on security in Afghanistan, and the limited nation-building achievements.... This security-focused spending indicates that right from 2001, the priorities of the U.S.-led international community for Afghanistan were not in line with those of the Afghan population. Rather ... the international community has prioritized physical, military-focused security over the relief of Afghans' extreme poverty and economic instability."

Guillaume Fournier, Afghanistan Country Manager for the Senlis Council, told CBC Radio One in September, "The biggest hindrance to reconstruction is the weekly bombing of civilians."

According to World Bank estimates, Afghanistan needs \$27.5 billion to rebuild its shattered social and physical infrastructure. But according to Senlis, Afghanistan received only \$7.3 billion between 2002 and 2006, while NATO military spending was \$82.5 billion during that time.



A September 23 Canwest News Service article, entitled “Reconstruction in Baby Steps,” described the reality of Canadian reconstruction efforts in Kandahar province. A Canadian military officer said that resources are lacking and reconstruction is still a “work in progress.” “I don’t have a squadron’s worth of engineers here. I don’t have troops that go out with equipment and build things and build bridges.”

The September 26 *Globe and Mail* reports that an ambulance donated by Canada for use by the medical center in the Panjwahi agricultural district west of Kandahar city four months ago is instead being used by local police and government administrators. Two doctors in the medical center told the reporter they are not keen to work with NATO-organized medical clinics because of the deep resentment of the population towards the occupiers.

Similar failure surrounds the British presence, according to the September 9 *Economist* magazine. Citing one example, it wrote, “British troops in Helmand (a neighbouring province to Kandahar), who have \$36 million to spend this year, have built the odd bridge and market stall...”

If the failure of “reconstruction” in Afghanistan is little known in Canada, one reason is the concerted efforts by authorities to hide it. An article by Geoffrey York in the June 3 *Globe and Mail* described the rules for journalists working in Afghanistan who choose to “embed” with Canadian forces.

“The restrictions warned sternly that I could be ejected from the military base if I spent ‘an inordinate amount of time’ covering non-military activity. The Department of National Defence doesn’t want the embedded reporters to write much about refugees, schools, health care or electricity – all the basic realities of life for Afghans.”

### **Warmaking trumps “reconstruction”**

In early September, the 2,300 Canadian troops in Kandahar launched a massive ground assault in Panjwahi district, code-named “Operation Medusa” and backed by U.S. troops and airpower. Residents were warned in advance of the offensive to leave their homes and villages.

The assault was declared a huge success several weeks later. “More than one thousand” enemy fighters were said to be killed. But reporters saw few bodies of resistance fighters.

Canadian and NATO authorities admitted that fighters had staged an orderly retreat and appealed for more troops into the area. Canada quickly dispatched several hundred more soldiers, and for the first time it will be deploying tanks. Deadly attacks on Canadian and other NATO forces resumed within days of the “victory.”

Meanwhile, some 20,000 residents were made homeless after their homes, villages and crops were destroyed in the fighting. Winter is approaching and they face an uncertain future.

The September 11 *Globe and Mail* reported on the use of the chemical weapon white phosphorous during “Operation Medusa.” The banned weapon is now routinely used against

Afghan fighters and to destroy agricultural plantings. The chemical severely burns human flesh upon contact.

### **Deepening resistance**

U.S./NATO officials say they are surprised by the scope and success of the resistance to their latest offensives. “The fighting is extraordinarily intense,” said the commander of British forces in Afghanistan. “The intensity and ferocity of the fighting is far greater than in Iraq.”

But the reasons for deepening resistance are not difficult to understand. The Senlis report states:

“During the past five years, there have been some limited achievements in Afghanistan.... Yet these visible achievements, frequently lauded in the West, mask the [Afghan government’s] lack of independence and the growing irrelevance of the Afghan government to the Afghan people.”

The Afghan puppet government and its police and army forces are deeply resented by much of the population for their corruption and abuse. Looting and wanton destruction by foreign and puppet forces routinely follow in the wake of their military operations.

On May 29, a popular uprising occurred in the streets of Kabul following yet another in a long line of civilian deaths caused by reckless driving of a U.S. military convoy. Protesters marched on the presidential palace chanting “Death to America.” The protest was brutally suppressed, with Agence France-Presse reporting at least 14 protesters killed.

Canadian soldiers have killed civilians, including children, during patrols in Kandahar. Scores of civilians were killed during the recent “Operation Medusa” bloodletting.

“For 30 years, we’ve had this problem,” Abdul Zahir told a Globe and Mail reporter in June while caring for three injured relatives in a crowded hospital in Kandahar. “Foreign troops come here and start fights.”

The death toll of Afghans is so bad that even the puppet president Hamid Karzai has spoken out. In late June, during an earlier U.S./Canada/NATO offensive in southern Afghanistan, he declared, “It is not acceptable that in all this fighting, Afghans are dying. In the last three to four weeks, 500 to 600 Afghans were killed.”

The poppy eradication program pursued by occupation forces is another major reason for growing disaffection and is sharply criticized by the Senlis Council. Farmers receive no alternative support when their poppy plantings are destroyed.

### **Support for occupation eroding at home**

The Canadian government is losing support at home for its warmaking abroad, according to recent polls. An EKOS Research/*Toronto Star* poll in mid-September shows 48 percent opposed to Canada’s part in the war in Afghanistan and only 38 percent in favour.

Candidates for the leadership of the opposition Liberal Party are feeling the heat of shifting public opinion. Most now say they oppose the Canadian offensive operations in Kandahar. (The party initiated the Kandahar offensive last year while still in government.)

A major foreign policy report by the Canadian Senate that was issued on October 5 decries the absence of "reconstruction" projects in Afghanistan. "If we don't get aid in there, then we won't win militarily," said the chairman of the committee that produced the report.

### **NDP convention delegates vote for "troops out"**

Another sign of growing antiwar opinion was the vote by delegates at the national convention of the New Democratic Party in early September to demand a withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan. The resolution calls for "the safe and immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan."

The vote was a striking victory for antiwar forces and will help broaden support for antiwar protests.

Unfortunately, the resolution also provides justification for continuing Canadian military intervention in poor and underdeveloped countries, including Afghanistan, by advocating what it calls "peace building." It says the party should "support the continuation of development assistance to Afghanistan and democratic peace building in that country so that reconstruction efforts and good governance are achieved."

"Democratic peace building" is code language for continued violations of the sovereignty of the Afghan people. The same language served as justification for the invasion of Haiti in 2004 and overthrow of its popular government by Canada, the U.S. and France.

Leaders of the NDP have taken their distance from the "troops out" section of the resolution. Party leader Jack Layton told CBC Radio news on September 24 that he favours a continued military presence by Canada in Afghanistan. He said he wants an end to the current combat operations in Kandahar but a continuation of "peace-building."

The party's foreign affairs critic in Parliament, Alexa McDonough, wrote a newspaper column on September 17 that criticized the Canadian-led offensive in Kandahar but made no reference to a withdrawal of Canadian troops, from either Kandahar or anywhere else in Afghanistan.

### **Canada out of Afghanistan**

The Canadian government and its NATO allies have accomplished nothing for Afghans. They are propping up a reactionary and illegitimate government that has little popular support, have killed thousands of Afghans, and have destroyed crucial infrastructure and food production.

A column in the October 3 *Globe and Mail* by U.S. journalist Sarah Chayes underscored the dilemma of the occupation forces. She described the Afghanistan government of Harmid Karzai as, "a government devoured by corruption." It, "seems just as hostile to [the people's] legitimate interests as the Taliban are."

Chayes has no solution to this problem because she staunchly defends a continued presence of Canada and NATO in Afghanistan, and those forces in turn support and defend the very government that she so harshly condemns.

The occupation forces are deeply hostile to the social and economic aspirations of Afghanistan's poor majority. They are in Afghanistan to foster pipeline deals that will deliver oil from Central Asia to seaports and earn billions of dollars in profits for Canadian and other foreign oil companies. They are transforming Afghanistan into a military base to attack patriotic forces throughout Asia and the Middle East and to pressure and threaten China and Iran.

**October 28 day of antiwar action**

A cross-Canada day of protest against the war has been called by the Canadian Peace Alliance on October 28. The call is supported by growing numbers of political, social, student and religious organizations, including the Canadian Labour Congress, many local and regional trade unions, and the Canadian Islamic Congress.

People from across Canada will come into the streets on that day to demand the unconditional withdrawal of Canadian forces from Afghanistan.

In so doing, we will be joining with those in Afghanistan who are resisting the pillage and destruction of their country and who want democratic government and meaningful programs to improve living standards and rebuild the shattered country.

These protests will strengthen the struggle for justice and peace at home, including the fight to reverse the vast cuts to social programs recently announced by the Conservative Party government and the campaigns to end the abuses of democratic rights that led to the torture ordeal of Maher Arar and the indefinite detentions of political prisoners.

Socialist Voice #129, October 25, 2006

## **Toronto Hotel Workers Score Union Breakthrough**

*City-wide Mobilizations Make a Difference*

**By Chris Schenk**

On September 28, 800 hotel workers from across Toronto converged on the Sheraton Centre hotel, across the street from City Hall. Hundreds of hotel guests and thousands of people heading home from work faced a huge picket line. Music and chants created a festive atmosphere, but the picket line also showed the angry determination of hotel workers to win.

Recent months have seen many similar actions at hotels across Toronto, all part of the “Hotel Workers Rising” campaign of unionists organized in UNITE-HERE. Their efforts have now won contracts at the Sheraton and two other major hotels. The agreements mark a significant step forward for the unionists and stand in marked contrast to the many setbacks absorbed by workers in Canada in recent years.

### **‘Hotel Workers Rising’**

The hotel workers’ strategy is to unite in solidarity across hotel companies and even across cities in their battle for better wages and improved working conditions. No single group of hotel workers is strong enough to stand alone against the hotel owners, which now include some of the largest companies in the world.

Local 75 of UNITE-HERE has launched a coordinated campaign in 30 Toronto hotels where contracts expire this year. The campaign was made possible by a victory won in the previous round of bargaining, where workers achieved common bargaining dates. Additional gains included significant pay increases, trusteed benefit plans, reduced workload, and improved job security.

The determination of union members tipped the balance in that campaign. At one medium-sized downtown hotel, for example, the mainly Filipina unionists engaged in a “walk and work” in which they picketed the hotel before and after their shifts for five long months. The pickets occurred twice a day: once in the morning with pots and pans – the wake-up picket – and then an after-shift picket with a 12-foot inflated rat, “’cause this place is a rat hole” (for details see Schenk, in *Precarious Employment*, pages 335-352). They won dismissal of the anti-union hotel manager, in addition to all of their bargaining demands.

### **Meetings and Street Actions**

The UNITE-HERE campaign this year is based on continual activism of union members. Bargaining-unit meetings have been held in each hotel, and hundreds upon hundreds of hotel workers have taken part in mass rallies, demonstrations, and countless picket lines. Hotel employees’ consciousness of themselves as workers is undergoing remarkable, if uneven, change.

More workers than ever understand that their interests are different not only from those of their hotel employer, but from those of all hotel employers. Indeed, many profess that workers' interests are different from that of all employers.

Hotel Workers Rising, a campaign under way in cities across North America, aims to ease their workloads and improve the poverty-level living conditions of some of the most exploited workers. Hotel workers, particularly room attendants, are overwhelmingly immigrant women of colour. Their median wage is \$26,000 gross income per year, which compels many with families to work a second job.

In addition, corporate chains such as Starwood, Hilton, and Marriott have introduced what are termed "heavy beds" with larger and heavier mattresses, duvets, extra sheets, and five pillows, making rooms more strenuous and time-consuming to clean. As a result, many workers suffer from work-related pain.

Transnational giants have consolidated their hold on the hotel industry. The overall lodging industry "earned an estimated \$20.8 billion in profit before taxes in 2005 and those earnings are expected to increase by 21% in 2006." (UNITE-HERE fact sheet) The transnationals have put these immense financial resources to work in developing sophisticated resistance to unions and organizing drives. (See Steven Tufts' account in *Paths to Union Renewal*, page 201-220)

### **Contract Gains**

Nonetheless, the mass picket of September 28, following on mobilizations over many past months, turned out to be the final straw for the Sheraton Centre. On October 2, the union negotiating committee announced to their co-workers the highlights of a tentative settlement that incorporated most of their key demands, including:

- Establishment of a minimum wage for all workers of \$15 an hour, which affects the large low-paid classifications such as room attendants cleaners, dishwashers, and cashiers.
- An across-the-board wage increase of 12.5% for all employees, including those bumped up to \$15 per hour, over the four years of the contract.
- Work by the hour instead of by the number of rooms cleaned – a key demand in reducing workload.
- Job security: no layoffs due to sub-contracting.
- Total seniority will now count, instead of just department seniority.
- A Transportation Allowance to subsidize a public transit pass.
- Two personal days per year by the end of the contract to help all workers, especially those with families and children.
- All major renovation projects in the Sheraton chain to be done by unionized construction workers.

- Increased pension contributions.
- An innovative guarantee by Sheraton to workers in all new facilities that it manages or constructs that workers will have “the right to join our Union without the company interfering.”

In addition to these concessions, Sheraton cancelled the discipline meted out to over 200 workers who protested and rallied in the lobby of the hotel on September 21.

Sheraton hotel workers overwhelmingly ratified their new contract, with 80% in favour.

The Sheraton contract – the first hotel settlement in Toronto this year – sets a new standard for hotel work throughout the city. It has now been followed by contract settlements at the two Hilton hotels in Toronto: Downtown Hilton and Airport Hilton. Hotel workers will continue to fight to make sure all hotels in Toronto follow the pattern settlement. Workers at the Sheraton Centre and the Toronto Hiltons are committed to helping other workers achieve substantive improvements in the 27 hotels whose contracts are expiring.

Some of these employers are determined not to give way. For example, Toronto’s Delta Chelsea Hotel has just unilaterally suspended the grievance and arbitration procedure for workers in the hotel. It suspended over 70 workers in August during the International AIDS conference for choosing to wear a red AIDS ribbon plus a Hotel Workers Rising button. Community and union pressure forced the hotel to back down.

As union members, hotel workers, or community members, we need reaffirm our commitment to joining forces and taking collective action against any hotel that attempts to undermine the hard-won gains of hotel workers.

### **Road Forward for Labour**

Hotel workers across the city are benefiting from a remarkable level of support from other union and community activists. In turn, through their work with new immigrants and the improvements gained in working and living conditions in the service sector, hotel workers are inspiring others and building a stronger labour movement.

As difficult as it may be for so many hotel workers trying to hold down two jobs, balance family life and at the same time engage in collective action, their only way forward involves more of the same class-versus-class approach. The mass solidarity in the streets by hotel workers needs to be complemented by even more active solidarity from other unions both public and private sector.

Union activists and progressive community members can help make a difference by joining and supporting the rallies and mass pickets across the city. It is only in this way that hotel workers will rise!

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## **Washington's Iraq Occupation Kills 655,000**

**Two-Thirds in Baghdad Favour Immediate End to Occupation**

**By Doug Lorimer**

*(Green Left Weekly, October 18, 2006)* On October 11, a team of Iraqi physicians, whose work was overseen by U.S. epidemiologists at the Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health, published a study in *The Lancet*, a prestigious British medical journal, estimating that the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq has cost the lives of 655,000 Iraqis. We're very confident with the results," Gilbert Burnham, a Johns Hopkins physician and epidemiologist, told the *New York Times*. The team found that Iraq's mortality rate in the year before the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003 was 5.5 deaths per 1000 people. Since the invasion, it has averaged 13.3 deaths per 1000 people per year. Wounds from gunfire caused 56% of the violent deaths, with car and roadside bombs causing 14%, according to the survey results. Coalition artillery and air strikes caused 30% of the violent deaths.

By October 11, the death toll for the invading U.S.-led coalition had almost reached 3,000, with 2,754 U.S. and 232 allied foreign troops having been killed since the occupation began.

Over the past seven months the number of U.S. troops wounded in combat in Iraq has soared — from 300 in February to 776 in September, the October 8 *Washington Post* reported. The September figure was the highest monthly level since the U.S. military's assault on the rebel city of Fallujah two years ago, when 1,437 U.S. troops were wounded.

"More than 20,000 U.S. troops have been wounded in combat in the Iraq war, and about half have returned to duty," the *Post* noted. "While much media reporting has focused on the more than 2,700 killed, military experts say the number of wounded is a more accurate gauge of the fierceness of fighting because advances in armor and medical care today allow many service members to survive who would have perished in past wars. The ratio of wounded to killed among U.S. forces in Iraq is about 8 to 1, compared with 3 to 1 in Vietnam ...

"The rising toll of wounded reflects ongoing heavy combat in [Iraq's western province of] Anbar as well as in Baghdad, where U.S. troops face an escalation of small-arms and other attacks as they push into the city's most violent neighborhoods to rein in sectarian death squads, militias and insurgents, officers say."

Since July, the number of U.S. troops in Baghdad has been doubled to 15,400. By the end of September there were 141,000 U.S. troops deployed in Iraq. Associated Press reported on October 11 that the U.S. Army is "gearing up to keep current troop levels in Iraq for another four years."

In September, 74 U.S. troops were killed in Iraq, one-third of them in Baghdad. Most of the rest were killed in Anbar province, where fighting between U.S. troops forces and Iraqi guerrillas is most intense.

### **U.S. Loses Control**

The September 11 *Washington Post* reported that Colonel Peter Devlin, chief of intelligence for the U.S. Marine Corps in Iraq, sent a secret report to the Pentagon on August 16 saying that the 30,000 U.S. marines, soldiers and sailors in Anbar had been fought to a stalemate and lost political control of the province to anti-U.S. “insurgents.” Devlin’s assessment was later publicly acknowledged as being “right on target” by U.S. Army General Peter Chiarelli, the commander of the U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq.

As the war between Iraqi resistance fighters and the U.S. occupation forces has intensified over the last seven months, U.S. officials have sought to hide this fact by claiming that their troops are combatting a nascent “civil war” between “Shiite militias” and “Sunni insurgents.”

The Western corporate media has parroted this claim. Thus the *Post* claimed that the 35% jump in the number of U.S. troops wounded in Iraq since July’s figure of 574 was a result of U.S. soldiers fighting “block-by-block in Baghdad to try to check a spiral of sectarian violence that U.S. commanders warn could lead to civil war.”

Only a week earlier, on September 27, the *Post* had reported that, according to a U.S. State Department survey, in Baghdad “nearly three-quarters of residents polled said they would feel safer if U.S. and other foreign forces left Iraq, with 65% of those asked favoring an immediate pullout.”

The *Post*’s report added that interviews with “Baghdad residents in recent weeks suggest one central cause for Iraqi distrust of the Americans: They believe the U.S. government has deliberately thrown the country into chaos ... to create an excuse to keep its forces here.”

This was confirmed by a poll conducted on September 1-4 by the University of Maryland’s Program on International Policy Attitudes. The PIPA poll found that an “overwhelming majority” of Iraqis “believe that the U.S. military presence in Iraq is provoking more conflict than it is preventing.” This view was held by 78% of Iraqis — by 82% of Shiites and a near-unanimous 97% of Sunnis.

### **Resistance Widely Supported**

The PIPA poll also found that 61% of Iraqis approved of attacks on U.S. forces — up from 47% in January. Support for attacks on U.S. forces among Shiites had risen from 41% in January to 62% in September. Support for such attacks among Sunnis was 92%, up from 88% in January.

For more than a year now Sunni community leaders have repeatedly blamed death squads operated by Iraqi National Police — recruited and trained by the U.S. and led by U.S. “advisers” — for the growing number of abductions and execution-style killings of Sunni Iraqis.

Despite the exposure in November and December of two secret jails run by Iraqi interior ministry police commandos — jails in which nearly 200 prisoners had been starved, beaten and tortured — U.S. officials have dismissed such allegations.

On September 20, for example, U.S. Army General Joseph Peterson, who is in charge of training the Iraqi police, told a Baghdad media conference that there were 6,000 U.S. and allied foreign “advisers” embedded with the Iraqi police units. He stated that “none of the death squad members detained in the past month during a security operation in Baghdad had ties to the Ministry of Interior or other government agencies.”

However, at a media conference on October 4, U.S. military spokesperson General William Caldwell announced that an entire Iraqi police brigade — comprising around 800 officers — was being pulled out of service for “retraining” because of suspected involvement in death-squad activities.

Caldwell said Iraqi officials ordered the police brigade withdrawn from Baghdad after 26 workers, most of them Sunnis, were kidnapped on October 2 from a meat-packing plant in a neighbourhood the brigade was supposed to be protecting. Seven of the workers had been killed. The next day, men wearing police uniforms and driving police trucks kidnapped 14 people from a shopping district.

The October 4 *New York Times* reported that an “American military official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that some of the members of the unit had been directly implicated in death-squad killings.”