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The Holocaust and Defense of the Palestinians

Forces responsible for slaughter of Jews now oppress the Palestinian people

By Suzanne Weiss

This article is based on a talk given to a meeting of Muslim Unity of Toronto on December 23, 2006.

Sixty years ago, a mass slaughter – a holocaust – was carried out against European Jews. Today its memory is being misused to build support for Zionism and to oppress and murder the Palestinians.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper says that Canada must not talk with Hezbollah or Hamas, organizations that defend the Palestinians, because they “advocate wiping Israel off the face of the Earth” — an objective that he says is “ultimately genocidal,” that is, another holocaust. (*Globe & Mail*, Dec. 21, 2006) He uses this excuse to justify punishing Palestinians for electing Hamas by cutting off aid to their government.

This is the Stephen Harper who on July 14, 2006, called Israel’s slaughter of the Lebanese a “measured response” to the abduction of two Israeli soldiers.

The Harper government and its allies are trying to make it a crime to oppose the Zionist state of Israel. For this supposed crime they punish Hamas and the Palestinians with bombs, shootings, and blockade. And even here in Canada, universities discipline students and professors that speak out against Zionist crimes.

And how can they call replacing the Israeli state with a democratic, united Palestine “genocide”?

The country of Czechoslovakia was dissolved in 1993 – wiped off the face of the map! The apartheid state of South Africa was abolished in 1994. In both cases, this was not genocide but a peaceful settlement.

Why do Canadian officials speak so irresponsibly? They use the Holocaust as an excuse to smother dissent. Because the German Nazis killed six million Jews, the U.S., Canada, and Israel insist that Palestinians must pay the price today.

Misuse of the Holocaust

We are told that because Hitler killed the Jews, the Zionist state is needed today, supposedly to protect the Jewish people. Protect against them whom? Against the Nazis? No, against the Palestinians.

This is the motivation for Canada's governments' public campaign about the Nazis' Holocaust.

Canadian school children today know more about the Holocaust than they know about crimes in our own country: crimes such as stealing the lands of the indigenous peoples or throwing Canadians of Japanese descent into concentration camps during the Second World War.

In Washington, the U.S. government has sponsored an imposing Holocaust Museum. Why is there no museum to the Vietnamese, millions of whom were killed in the U.S. war against their country?

When the Nazi campaign against the Jews was in full swing, Canada's prime minister at that time, Mackenzie King, praised Hitler (see Irving Abella, *None is Too Many*). Few voices protested Hitler's mass murders. The Catholic Church kept silent. The U.S. and Canada excluded Jewish refugees.

For several decades after, governments said little about this horrendous crime.

But as the Israeli army proved it could defeat in battle the neighboring Arab states, the U.S. moved to build up the Israeli military as a weapon against the Mideast peoples. They needed an excuse for this provocative campaign, and they found it in the Holocaust. They insist that the Zionist state of Israel must be protected in order to prevent another Holocaust.

To answer this argument, we must know what the Holocaust was.

What was the Holocaust?

First of all, the basic facts are indisputable. The Holocaust is one of the best documented historical events of all time. The Nazis were methodical — they counted their victims and kept meticulous records. In my family's Polish home town, of Piotrkov there were 30,000 Jews, only 100 survived. On the train that took my mother from France to Auschwitz, of 1,000 Jews, only a dozen survived.

Yes, this was genocide. Six million Jews were killed simply because they were Jews, and the goal was to kill them all. Even the innocent children were hunted down and sent to the gas chambers.

Of course it was not the first genocide. European colonialists exterminated almost entire peoples. Study the Americas, Australia, and Africa.

But the genocide against the Jews was unique in two ways.

First, it took place not in the industrially undeveloped Third World but in *Europe*. It was the first case of genocide against a white, European people.

Second, it was industrially organized. Not random killing, but managerial, bureaucratic, assembly-line slaughter. Even pieces of the body were recycled: the skin, the hair; and the gold fillings of the teeth.

In a deeper sense, though, the crime against the Jews was only too familiar. The Nazis said that the Jews were *not* Europeans but members of an inferior, subhuman race, Asiatic race. The Nazis sought to reorganize the globe along racial lines, with the Germans and North Europeans as the elite. Such racism is opposed to our most fundamental beliefs about the worth of human beings.

Where does this racism come from? Not from the House of Islam. Recall how the great U.S. Islamic leader and freedom fighter, Malcolm X, said when he visited Mecca that for the first time he saw peoples of all races worshipping together in equality.

No, this racism is the ideology of Euro-American imperialism.

The British imperialists used racism to rationalize building an empire around the world. Racism was used to justify enslaving the Africans and pillaging India.

And the U.S. empire today rests on racism, in its own country through the oppression of Blacks and immigrants but also internationally. And the racist oppression of the Palestinian people is part of this.

Governments who subjugate races and set races, religions, and nationalities against each other have an economic objective. Imperialist racism aims to enable the owners of capital to make the highest profits by exploiting oppressed peoples. In South Africa it was diamond mines. In the Middle East it is oil.

Given the proven hostility of European and North American governments during the Holocaust, many Jewish survivors in Europe saw Palestine as their only possible refuge. This was a historical tragedy, for which imperialism is ultimately responsible.

Four hundred and fifty years earlier, the Jewish victims of the Spanish inquisition were welcomed by the Muslim societies on the Mediterranean, where they lived and flourished into our times. But the Zionist project that steered twentieth-century Jewish refugees from Europe toward Palestine aimed not to enhance Muslim society but to displace it by taking the land.

Israel would not have been born except for the U.S. and Great Britain. It lives today only because of the support of the U.S. and British who fund it through massive government subsidies in various forms to supply the Zionist government with the weapons of destruction.

These governments wage war on Iraq and Afghanistan for the same reasons they support Israel. They want power; they want oil. Israel is the weapon that they use to keep the peoples of the Middle East in check.

We must defend Iran

But the Holocaust is now being used not only against the Palestinians but also against Iran. Bush calls Iran part of the axis of evil and wants to overthrow its government. The U.S. is planning for a possible attack against Iran, perhaps even with nuclear weapons, and perhaps using their proxy, the Israeli military.

They do this because Iran, in a great revolution in 1979, kicked out the U.S. puppet shah. Iran seized control of its oil; and won its independence. Washington has never forgiven the Iranian people for that great act.

Of course Washington will never admit this. Among their excuses is the fact that Iran opposes Zionism. And more recently, the fact that Iran held a conference and set up a commission questioning the historical truth of the Jewish Holocaust.

From several points of view, this conference was a blow to the struggle against imperialism. It divided the anti-imperialist movement, while pointing toward an alliance with the openly anti-Jewish forces in the imperialist camp. This orientation was symbolized by the presence on the conference platform of the openly White supremacists such as U.S. politician David Duke and apologists for Nazism. And the conference provided a platform for the absurd charge that Holocaust survivors' testimony is a hoax. Such slanders target the Jewish people, not Zionism, as the enemy. The Holocaust deniers' verdict that imperialism is innocent of this historical crime feeds illusions regarding the nature of this murderous system.

It would have been better for Iran to sponsor an international conference on Zionism and Israel's crimes against the people of the Middle East.

By raising the Holocaust issue, Iranian president Ahmadinejad has diverted attention from his proposed solution of the Palestinian crisis, namely to abolish the Zionist regime and hold elections among "Jews, Christians and Muslims so the population of Palestine can select their government and destiny for themselves in a democratic manner." (*Jerusalem Post*, December 12, 2006) This is the historic goal of the Palestinian movement for a democratic state embracing the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, a goal widely supported by progressive people around the world.

Anti-Semitism and Zionism

The Zionist state of Israel carries out its crimes in the name of the Jewish people, and conscripts Israeli Jews to enforce this oppression.

This state uses many of the methods of Nazism to oppress the Palestinians, including confining them in walled ghettos. It is understandable that many victims of Zionism feel resentment against Jews, but we cannot blame *all* Jews for the crimes Israel commits in their name, any more than we blame all Americans for Bush's crimes in Iraq or all Canadians for Stephen Harper's crimes in Afghanistan. We must focus on our real enemy: Zionism and imperialism.

The Palestinian liberation movement itself has never been motivated by anti-Jewish feeling. It simply wants the right for the Palestinian people, including the exiles, to live in peace with equal rights on their native land.

The Arab communities of North Africa and the Middle East had no share in guilt for the Holocaust. There is no tradition of anti-Semitism in Islamic civilization. The prejudice against Jews grew up in Christian Europe, hand in hand with racism, as an aspect of the growth of capitalism. And imperialism, above all Euro-American imperialism, is still the source from which this poison spreads.

The Jewish Holocaust's true lessons

There are two important lessons in the story of the murder of Europe's Jews.

First, that there is no limit to the savagery of imperialism. If not opposed, it will exterminate entire peoples, like the Palestinians.

Second, to fight back against imperialism we need a broad unity of peoples of many faiths and nationalities.

In my own background lies an example of this concept. I was born to a Jewish family in France during the Second World War. The French government was then rounding up the Jews, solely because of their religious and ethnic background, and deporting them to Hitler's death camps.

My parents belonged to a Jewish resistance organization. It was united with other immigrant groups and with French working people – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim together – in the battle against the Nazis.

The resistance saved the lives of thousands of Jewish children in France, including me. And this resistance struck heavy blows against French racism and anti-Jewish hatred, which are felt to this day.

Today we must join in a similar broad alliance, this time to defend the Palestinians and to oppose Zionism.

The Zionists' aggressive policies in the Middle East are against the interests of Jewish people and Palestinians alike, all of whom have a stake in a peaceful and united Middle East.

Palestinian liberation offers the Jewish people in the Middle East the prospect of brotherhood and peace.

United against Zionism

Venezuela is today in the lead in building anti-Zionist unity. That country campaigned strongly against the Israeli war in Lebanon.

Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez did not hesitate to condemn the U.S. sponsors of Israeli aggression and to withdraw his country's ambassador from Israel. "The hand of the Americans is

spurring [Israel] on,” he told the Arab TV network Al-Jazeera, (Aug. 4, 2006). The “real threat to the world is the imperialistic threat posed by the U.S,” he said.

“We must defeat imperialism in this century, so that this elite will not annihilate the world.” This is Chavez’s message to all of us.

The Venezuelan people have endorsed this policy with a 63% vote for Chávez in their elections. They are repaying the very great debt that their country owes — that we *allowe* — to all those in the Mideast who resist Zionism and imperialism.

[In a United Nations debate January 26, 2007, Venezuela stated that Israel’s excesses have “led to a new Holocaust against the Palestinian people” and that Iraqis also are “victims of a Holocaust.” —S. W.]

In Canada, we have built a broad alliance for Palestinian liberation called the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA), uniting Muslim, Christian, and Jewish fighters against Zionism. CAIA has a Jewish sister organization called Not In Our Name (NION).

We have launched a nation-wide joint campaign for boycott and sanctions against the Zionist state of Israel. The first focus of action is a boycott of the Chapters/Indigo Bookstore chain whose majority owners use their profits to build Heseg, the foundation that recruits non-Israelis to fight in the Israeli military. As Israeli soldiers, they participate in operating checkpoints that restrict Palestinian freedom of movement, enforcing the occupation of Palestinian land, and has a documented history of human rights violations.

The CAIA initiative is a promising beginning to educate and inform the public on the issues in the Palestinian struggle. It is an excellent way to expose Israel’s crimes in the Middle East, and to rally as we did against South Africa’s Apartheid system. Those who wish to be active in this process should get in touch with the CAIA.

We should press forward these and other efforts to liberate the Palestinians and to put an end to Zionist and imperialist wars and oppression in the Middle East.

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The Birth of Canadian ‘Peacekeeping’

Since its inception in the 1948 partition of Palestine, United Nations peacekeeping has been, with Canadian support, an instrument of oppression.

By Ian Beeching

In their current drive to build up Canada’s army and its war-making role, Canada’s rulers rely on its reputation for “peacekeeping” as part of United Nations missions abroad. Many Canadians, including on the left, agree that there is a just and humanitarian role for the army and even propose peacekeeping as a positive alternative to Canada’s present war in Afghanistan.

But Canadian peacekeeping is a myth. Nowhere is this so clear as in the birth of peacekeeping, that is, in Canada’s role in the creating the state of Israel at the expense of the Palestinian people. “Peace” was kept for the Israeli state while the Palestinians were driven from their homes.

A shift in strategy

Peacekeeping was born in the era of rising liberation struggles following the World War II, when many oppressed countries freed themselves from direct colonial rule. In 1949 capitalism was shaken by the second great anticapitalist revolution of the century, when China won its freedom from imperialism. This triumph spurred struggles across Asia and Africa; America and its imperialist allies were in retreat.

With many colonies achieving independence, imperialism had to develop new mechanisms to keep its grip on its wealth — a new strategy that would allow some forms of political independence so long as the prerogatives of foreign capital were protected. One aspect of this strategy was the development of a form of military intervention that could march under a pretence of humanitarian concern while hiding the beast of capital. The result was UN peacekeeping. It opened the door to non-colonial powers, like Canada, to play a role in the imperialist enterprise, and thus had special importance for the rulers of this country.

The 1948 partition of Palestine

What we know as peacekeeping began with the partitioning of Palestine in 1948. This early experiment in peacekeeping was limited in scope. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) forces did not attack poor unarmed civilians as UN troops in Haiti do today. The main purpose of UNTSO was to supervise the Armistice Agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Yet UNTSO and more aggressive recent peacekeeping ventures have had the same hidden agenda.

British, U.S., and allied powers saw a Zionist state in Palestine as a buttress against the wave of Arab nationalism in the Middle East. (Zionism is the ideology that views historic Palestine as an exclusive enclave for Jewish immigrants from other parts of the world.) Britain was too weakened by World War II to continue its colonial grip on Palestine. A new and creative way of

establishing Western interests in the Middle East was needed, one that would minimize resistance from the Soviet Union and Arab countries — and it was found in the United Nations.

The conflict then raging in Palestine was an indirect result U.S./British policies. When western countries, including Canada, barred Jewish refugees escaping the Holocaust, many Jewish people saw Palestine as their only salvation. With the rapid growth of Jewish settlements on Arab land, Palestinians rose in protest. Britain was forced in 1939 to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine. The Zionists in Palestine, unhappy with Britain's decision, waged a terrorist campaign against British forces and the indigenous Arab populations. In 1947, exhausted from World War Two and unable to maintain control, Britain turned its mandate in Palestine over to the United Nations, which organized the creation of Israel.

The terms of partition were grossly unfair. The Zionist state received 56% of Palestinian territory, although Jews were a minority in Palestine and owned only 9% of the land. Even worse, the partition launched a pro-imperialist state that was expansionist and deeply hostile to the Arab population of the region. All this was done against the clearly expressed will of the majority of Palestine's inhabitants.

Canada played a central role in the partition. Lester B. Pearson, who became Canada's minister of external affairs in 1946, chaired the first committee on Palestine at the UN and was a strong supporter of Zionism. Brushing aside any thought of alternatives, he said: "I have never wavered in my view that a solution to the problem was impossible without the recognition of a Jewish state." Canada sat on the United Nations special committee on Palestine, with justice Ivan Rand as its representative, and voted for the UN resolution that imposed partition.

Arab resistance to the project led to the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, in which Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Iraq fought unsuccessfully to maintain Palestine's integrity.

In an attempt to secure Israel's existence and give it the breathing space it needed to build its army, in 1948 the United Nations decided, with Canadian support, to set up the UNTSO peacekeeping force to maintain a ceasefire between Israel and Arab states. Canada contributed a military contingent.

UNTSO forces remained stationed on Israel's borders, — indeed they are there still. They did not succeed in keeping the peace. Assisted by UNTSO protection, however, Israel, which has received more than \$134 billion in U.S. aid since 1949 dramatically increased its military capability — by 2005 it was the fifteenth-largest military spender in the world. .

After only a few years, in 1956 Israel launched an aggressive war against its Egyptian neighbour. Again, Canada intervened through peacekeeping.

Suez Canal crisis

In 1952, a revolutionary movement in Egypt overturned the monarchy and ended British control, asserting the country's sovereignty. A process of social and economic reform led on July 26, 1956, to Egypt's nationalization of the foreign-owned company operating the Suez Canal—the

sea link between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The takeover was consistent with Egyptian and international law, but imperialist forces would not accept this affront. Britain and France made a secret deal with Israel to invade Egypt and retake the canal.

On October 29, Israel attacked Egypt, rapidly advancing toward the canal. Almost immediately England and France issued an ultimatum demanding that Egypt pull its forces 10 miles back from the canal. When Egypt refused to withdraw from its own territory, Britain and France launched a full-scale war and occupied the canal area.

The move by England and France met immediate resistance from the United States, due to conflicting economic interests in the region. The U.S. asked the UN Security Council to order a ceasefire but was blocked by a veto from France and Britain. The General Assembly then passed the ceasefire resolution in a non-binding vote of 64 to 5, with Canada abstaining. The U.S. used economic pressure to force British compliance.

In a conflict between its British and U.S. allies, the Canadian government was caught in the middle. The impending disaster in relations between of Britain and United States threatened the Canadian government's international alliances and its domestic stability.

Ottawa was not concerned with the arrogant violation of international law represented by the British-French-Israeli invasion – but it thought the invasion was reckless and poorly thought out. Pearson explained on October 29: “I don't for one minute criticize the motives of the governments of the United Kingdom and France ... I may have thought their intervention was not wise, but I do not criticize their purpose.”

Pearson arrived at the United Nations in New York determined to find a compromise between Canada's quarrelling allies. As he explained to U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on October 31, “We are interested in helping Britain and France. I would like to make it possible for them to withdrawal with as little loss of face as possible, and bring them back into realignment with the U.S.” First, Pearson proposed that the UN take over command of Anglo-French occupation forces. That proposal met strong resistance from many UN member countries, and was quickly abandoned. On November 3, Canada introduced a resolution to have United Nations forces occupy the canal area as a replacement for British-French-Israeli forces.

With Egypt's consent, United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) troops entered the country. A contingent of 1,007 Canadian troops formed part of the 10-country, 6,000-strong force. The UNEF forces stood between the opposing forces and ensured the foreign invaders could leave with their hands clean. Meanwhile, the Israeli state moved on to its career of conquest.

Violation of sovereignty

Shortly following the establishment of UNEF, Israel began a troop build-up along the Syrian boarder. To deter an invasion of Syria, Egypt wished to assume a military position along the Egypt-Israel border, and ordered UN troops to leave the country to make this possible.

Under the original UN agreement Egypt had every right to tell UN troops to leave whenever it wished. Pearson had provided assurances that the UN was to “enter Egyptian territory with the consent of the Egyptian Government, in order to help maintain quiet during and after the withdrawal of non-Egyptian forces.” Yet when Egypt requested UNEF withdrawal, Pearson insisted, in blatant violation of Egyptian sovereignty, that Egypt had no right “to tell the force when it shall leave.”

As a result of Canada’s clear support of Israel and its biased role in both the 1948 partition of Palestine and the 1956 Suez Canal crisis, it was no longer accepted among Arab nations as a neutral arbiter. As a result, Canada was the first country asked to remove its troops from the UNEF forces in Egypt. Gamal Abdul Nasser, president of Egypt, said this was because of Canada’s “biased stand in favour of Israel.” On May 16, 1967, the Egyptian government ordered all UNEF forces out of the country.

Canada’s role in the creation of Israel has won wide recognition in Zionist circles. The president of the Canadian Jewish Congress from 1939 to 1962, Samuel Bronfman, “praised Canada for having played the most important part in partitioning Palestine.” To show its appreciation of Canada’s role in its formation Israel erected a “Canada Park” on the rubble of bulldozed homes where an Arab village had once stood.

Israel continues to this day to take over Palestinian land and homes, bulldozing everything in its path. The General Assembly of the UN has passed by overwhelming majorities countless resolutions condemning Israel and demanding the right of self-determination for the Palestinians. Canada has voted against almost every such motion.

This past summer, Israel bombed a well-marked and clearly identified UNTSO observation post in Lebanon, during the Israeli attack. The strike killed a Canadian, yet Prime Minister Harper brushed it off and let Israel go without even a verbal warning.

‘Peacekeeping’ marches on

Since 1956 there have been many other examples of peacekeeping. In most, the results were tragic for the people involved.

Between 1964 and 1993 Canada maintained a peacekeeping force of 1,500 troops in Cyprus that supported and prolonged a U.S.-orchestrated regime change and a partition of the island.

In 1992 Canada contributed 1,300 troops to the UN mission in Somalia that was supposedly to end a famine and bring stability to the country. But this mission quickly turned from food distribution to the kidnapping of Somalian General Mohammed Farrah Aidid. Canadian soldiers, acting under orders, tortured and murdered several innocent unarmed Somali men. The resulting official investigation into Somalia affair was the first such inquiry in Canadian history that was terminated without being completed.

In 2004 Canada along with France and the United States, orchestrated a coup overthrowing Haiti’s democratically elected president. This led to a brutal UN occupation, with Canadian

participation. (For more on Haiti, see *Socialist Voice* #90, “Haitian Masses Move Forward Against Foreign Occupation.”)

In Afghanistan, Canada has now — for the first time since the 1950-53 Korean War — thrown aside the mask of peacekeeping and moved to open war.

A minority of ruling-class voices fear that Canada’s war against the Afghanistan people is not winnable and advocate peacekeeping as an alternative. Others argue that Canadian forces should be shifted to peacekeeping assignments in other countries, such as in the Darfur region of Sudan. This demand, which has unfortunately been endorsed by the NDP, will not serve the interests of the suffering people in Darfur. Peacekeeping Darfur would serve as a cover for increased imperialist penetration of oil-rich Sudan.

The only principled position that antiwar forces in Canada can take is firm opposition to any international deployment of Canadian armed forces, whether or not they are mislabeled as “peacekeepers.”

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Socialist Voice #151, February 22, 2007

The Cuban Revolution Inspired the Independentist Movement

Quebec's 'Américanité' Does Not Stop at the United States

The following article by Pierre Dubuc appears in the February 2007 issue (No. 256) of l'aut journal, a monthly newspaper of the Quebec left (circulation 30,000). Dubuc is the paper's editor and a central leader of SPQ-Libre (Syndicalistes et progressistes pour un Québec libre), a left-wing ginger group in the Parti Québécois. SPQ-Libre seeks to reverse the PQ's neoliberal direction and win PQ support for workers and their unions.

Dubuc mentions another component of the Quebec sovereigntist movement, the newly formed Québec solidaire party, which is seeking to build a broad pluralist left alternative to the PQ around anti-neoliberal, feminist, and ecological concepts. While SPQ-Libre has about 500 members, Québec solidaire's membership is about 10 times larger, and growing rapidly. (See Socialist Voice #103)

As Dubuc's article indicates, however, the debate over these issues and questions of strategy continues within the Quebec left and pro-independence movement. And a central question that is only beginning to be addressed today — amidst the new rise in antiwar feeling — is how to link the Québécois fight against imperialism and national oppression with similar movements around the world.

In our opinion, Dubuc's article is an important contribution to that discussion. It places the fight for Quebec independence squarely in the context of the developing hemispheric movement of opposition to North American imperialist domination. And it correctly identifies the ongoing progressive role of the Cuban revolution and the Castro leadership in that process.

The term Américanité, as it is employed by Dubuc, refers to a concept that is becoming more current in Quebec as it continues to develop and define an identity that is both French in its cultural, linguistic and historical heritage and "American," that is, a distinct nation that, while today a part of the Canadian state, is increasingly conscious of its hemispheric vocation. — The Editors

By Pierre Dubuc

Fidel Castro's triumphal entry into Havana on January 8, 1959 is one of the memorable events of the 20th century. The shock wave swept through Latin America and its reverberations also reached Quebec. Three years later, when the Lesage government announced its intention to nationalize the electricity companies, the shadow of Cuba and its expropriation of U.S. companies such as United Fruit loomed in the background. The North American Anglo-Saxon

press charged that the Minister of Natural Resources, René Lévesque, was the Castro of the North.

But the Cuban Revolution served above all as an inspiration to the Quebec independentist movement, along with the decolonization movement in Africa and the civil rights movement of American Blacks. Revolutionary-minded youth could not help but be passionate about all the mythology surrounding these 12 men hiding in the Sierra Maestra after surviving their landing from the Granma in 1956, organizing a victorious uprising thirteen [three] years later.

The development of guerrillas in Latin America, with Cuba's encouragement, and above all Che Guevara's guerilla struggle in Bolivia, was then perceived as a new revolutionary model, an alternative to the reformist, fossilized Communist Parties that no longer dared to challenge the Monroe doctrine and accepted Latin America as the private preserve of the United States.

The revolutionary élan often took the form of adventurism and Quebec was not to be outdone, with the creation of the Front de libération du Québec. Inspired by the urban guerilla of the American Black Panthers and especially the Uruguayan Tupamaros, the FLQ carried out some political kidnappings in October 1970.

While Cuba agreed to serve as a land of exile for the FLQers responsible for the kidnapping of James Richard Cross, that could not be construed as an expression of support for the cause of Quebec independence. Rather, it was a service rendered to a friendly country, Canada!

As Realpolitik would have it, Havana found an ally in the government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, who used Cuba to demonstrate his desire to loosen the grip of the United States. In 1976, Trudeau made one of the first State visits to Cuba by a Western leader since the imposition of the U.S. embargo. He brought millions of dollars in Canadian aid and loans. In his speech, Trudeau declared "Long live Commander in Chief Fidel Castro. Long live Cuban-Canadian friendship."

No matter how much Fidel Castro would proclaim his intention at that time to build socialism, voluntarism quickly showed its limits. If, soon after the October Revolution, Lenin, seeing that the revolutionary fervour was not spreading to Germany and the other European countries as he had hoped, could develop the theory of building socialism in a single country, it was because the USSR extended over a sixth of the globe and was crammed with all the natural resources needed for the development of modern industry.*

This was far from the case in Cuba, a country of sugar monoculture deprived of oil. And the Communist International had concluded in the Thirties that it was impossible to erect a socialist economic base in the Caribbean and West Indies countries without the creation of a socialist federation of these countries.

It is a miracle that Cuba has managed to hold out for more than 40 years, despite the U.S. embargo and the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Or rather, it is the genius of Fidel Castro who was able to maneuver on this agitated sea, even if it meant allowing when necessary the controlled

development of a market economy and promoting the expansion of tourism with all that that entails.

In these extremely difficult conditions, Cuba has wagered and won in the effort to feed, educate and care for its population. Illiteracy has been vanquished, infant mortality reduced to a rate of 0.9%. Life expectancy (73) is higher than that in some parts of Montréal. The health system is one of the best in the world and about 20,000 doctors have been sent by Cuba to 60 Third World countries. Fidel Castro was the first head of state to be given the Health for All medal by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Cuba can today look forward to a better economic future by virtue of its alliance with Hugo Chávez's Venezuela and the emergence of left-wing governments in Latin America — a situation on an altogether different scale from the time of the guerrillas. Curiously, these developments seem to arouse little interest in Quebec, at a time when the sovereigntist movement should be looking for support for international recognition of a sovereign Quebec. And this, moreover, in a political context in Canada that is otherwise relatively favourable for the sovereigntists. For in contrast to the Trudeau period, there is little chance that Prime Minister Stephen Harper will be toasting the health of the Cuban revolution.

To explain this lack of interest, it is necessary to go back to the late 1970s, when the revolutionary left in Quebec was eroded by the Maoist movement. In practice, it left the strictly political terrain that had been held by the RIN and the FLQ, with leaders like Pierre Bourgault and Pierre Vallières and an often brilliant use of the mass media (as by the FLQ cells during the October Crisis).

On the pretext that it is “the masses who make history,” the militants entered the factories, their principal activity a pathetic tail-ending of the working class in its spontaneous economic struggles.

Politically, the Maoists aligned themselves on Mao's “theory of the three worlds.” A theory that replaced the classic alliance of the working class with the oppressed peoples in opposition to imperialism by an alliance of the Third World countries with the countries of the second world — including Canada — against the first world, the USSR and the United States. The alliance of third and second worlds soon encompassed half the first world, that is the United States, as became manifest with Nixon's trip to China in 1972 where he sealed his alliance with Mao.

According to this theory, Canada was a country in the “revolutionary” camp, and the Quebec question became a very “secondary” contradiction. This led the Maoist movement to support the camp of the No — in the disguised form of abstention — during the 1980 referendum.

The Maoist movement was so hegemonic within the Quebec left that the creation in 1966 of the Tricontinental, Cuba's initiative to counter Maoism in the Third World, had virtually no echo in Quebec.

It may seem strange and completely useless to evoke these events today, in a context that seems far removed from that time. But in many respects the global justice [*altermondialiste*] movement, which incorporates the Quebec left of today, is the heir — purged of revolutionary phraseology, of course — of the Maoist and Tricontinental left.

However, because these movements evaporated without any real critique of their practices and theories, their weaknesses and errors persist. With Québec solidaire and the SPQ-Libre, the left is re-entering the political arena, but has not yet mastered the political and media game of its ancestors of the 1960s.

More important still, its political strategy is still confused. However, the emergence of left-wing governments in Latin America and Canada's economic, political and military alignment with the United States ordain support for the independence of Quebec and the development of close relations with the progressive Latin American governments.

But the altermondialist left of Maoist origin still hesitates in its support for the sovereigntist project, a project with an extraordinary potential for social change that this left has failed to adequately assess. And the sovereigntist left is still in the tow of Jacques Parizeau's Great Game of 1995, which essentially counted on diplomatic recognition by France and certain countries of La Francophonie to force the hand of the United States.

In recent years, Quebec has rediscovered its *Americanité*. Politically, this has served above all to legitimate the free-trade agreements with the United States. It would be appropriate today to expand its resonance to the political Great Game under way in Latin America.

Quebec would then renew with the political thought of Louis-Joseph Papineau. At the end of his life, the Patriote leader foresaw the metamorphosis of Québécois nationality in a continental identity, drawing on a liberatory "Colombian nationality" that would result from the confederation of the States of the three Americas. In this, Papineau was approaching the inter-Americanité of Simón Bolívar and even heralding the idea, once independence was acquired, of a union of the peoples of the Americas respectful of the sovereignty of each.

As a small nation, Quebec cannot emancipate itself without becoming a part of the great world liberatory movements. That was what Papineau and the Patriotes understood, inspired as they were by the American Revolution and the revolutionary movement that was sweeping Europe and Latin America.

This was understood by the independentists of the 1960s and even by René Lévesque, with the nationalization of electric power at the cost of being treated as the Castro of the North. We are not there yet. The leadership of the Parti Québécois, at the most recent meeting of the party's national council, opposed the nationalization of wind power out of fear that Quebec would be characterized as the Venezuela of the North!

The independentist left of Quebec should use the occasion of Fidel Castro's departure to reassess its political strategy. That would be the highest tribute it could give to the greatest symbol of the

emancipation of the peoples in the Americas since Simón Bolívar for Latin America and Louis-Joseph Papineau for Quebec.

[Translated by Richard Fidler]

Footnote

* The idea that the Soviet Union could build a socialist society solely by its own efforts was developed by Stalin, not Lenin. The collapse of the Soviet Union a decade and a half ago was the ultimate refutation of this mistaken concept, which in fact reflected the ideology of the counter-revolutionary bureaucratic caste that arose in the 1920s and after Lenin's death usurped the leadership of the state apparatus and ruling party. Lenin, on the other hand, was an internationalist who, in common with the pre-Stalinist Communist International, linked the prospects for survival and development of the revolution to the success of anti-imperialist and anticapitalist revolutionary movements throughout the world. Similarly, Cuba's internationalism has been key to the survival and ongoing vitality of its revolution. — *Socialist Voice*

Socialist Voice #152, February 26, 2007

Reviews: Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali, Richard Dawkins

by Barry Weisleder

Noam Chomsky. *Hegemony or Survival, America's Quest for Global Dominance.* Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Co.. New York, 2003. 278 pages

Hegemony or Survival lives up to its title. The prolific MIT professor of linguistics and philosophy explains how the American ruling class has long been in the business of imposing its will over an ever expanding domain of lands and peoples. Its behemoth state was built on the decimation and displacement of aboriginal tribes, the seizure of vast Mexican lands, and the conquest of Spanish possessions in the Caribbean and South-East Asia. Power was consolidated by the concentration of wealth, the suppression of organized working class opposition, and the penetration of foreign markets. US elite interest in world affairs often masqueraded as 'spreading democracy', but was actually about maximizing the conditions for private profit extraction.

Chomsky provides a telling example:

“The rise of fascism in the inter war period elicited concern, but was generally regarded rather favorably by the US and British governments, the business world, and a good deal of elite opinion. The reason was that the fascist version of extreme nationalism permitted extensive Western economic penetration and also destroyed the much-feared labour movements and the left, and the excessive democracy in which they could function.”

Chomsky's sarcasm, as in the “excessive democracy” phrase, sometimes confounds his meaning or devolves towards cynicism. But his trenchant critique resurrects: “Like Saddam Hussein half a century later, (Nazi Germany) retained substantial Anglo-American support until Hitler launched direct aggression that infringed too seriously on US and UK interests.”

(Lest we forget, Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King was also a Hitler admirer through the 1930s, and later turned away a ship load of Jewish refugees.)

The American ruling rich employed nationalist protectionism to promote home industries, and resorted to gun boat diplomacy to subdue resistors to its hemispheric hegemony. Protected from the ravages of European and Asian conflagration by two oceans, the US voraciously conscripted public funds to amass and deploy an enormous war machine, and graduated to post-WW2 super-power status. Its prime objective then became the elimination of the other super-power, whose post-capitalist basis posed a permanent obstacle, if not an active challenge, to the world capitalist system.

“Concern over Soviet economic development and its demonstration effect persisted into the 1960s, when the Soviet economy began to stagnate, in large measure because of the escalating arms race that Soviet Premier Khrushchev had sought desperately to prevent.”

Chomsky describes the 1962 Cuban missile crisis in this context, along with a series of bloody US (direct and indirect) interventions to thwart movements for social change from Iran to Nicaragua, from Palestine to Grenada, from Indonesia to Chile. The official excuse offered was “containment of the USSR”, and the derivative “war against state-sponsored terrorism.” The heavy irony inherent in the extensive global conduct of US state terrorism (as in the 1989 bombardment of civilian neighborhoods and the killing of thousands of Panamanians just to flush out a single man, the former US client-dictator Manuel Noriega), was not lost on many Latin Americans.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the stated rationale for US aggressive exertions shifted to a more frank, if not novel, expression.

Washington now speaks of “preventive” as opposed to “pre-emptive” war. It thus asserts the right to intervene with force against any nation whose leadership the US claims is *considering* the development of weapons of mass destruction. Naturally, this criterion does not apply to itself or to its client states. Nor is the approval of the United Nations or adherence to international law required.

And with that Chomsky walks us through two invasions of Iraq, the exorbitant US subsidy and integration of the colonial-settler state known as Israel, the erosion of civil liberties in the west, the occupation of Iraq, Afghanistan and the establishment of key US military bases in proximity to rich Central Asian oil reserves, and most worrisome, the placement of weapons of mass destruction in outer space — a zone the US intends to ‘own’, not just control.

What hope is there for our endangered species? Chomsky’s answer seems to come up a bit lame: “the slow evolution of a human rights culture” will act as the “restraining influence on state violence.” This will be supplemented by “popular activism” and “global justice movements.”

But isn’t the problem “the system?” And aren’t there signs of a revolutionary challenge to it?

Noam Chomsky. *Imperial Ambitions, Conversations on the Post-9/11 World, Interviews with David Barsamian.* Metropolitan Books. New York, 2005. 226 pages

This fast flowing dialog traces some of the same ground as Chomsky’s *Hegemony or Survival*, but delves more into strategic questions, though not always rewardingly.

Chomsky returns to the theme of ‘state security’, Washington’s long standing excuse for foreign intervention. He relates how this is often a hard line for other states to swallow. When Mexico refused to go along with President J. F. Kennedy’s terrorist attacks on Cuba, “the Mexican ambassador said, ‘If we publicly declare that Cuba is a threat to our security, forty million Mexicans will die laughing.’”

Elite distrust of democracy and the masses goes back to the foundation of the American republic, so the political establishment has a lot of experience stealing elections and distorting the truth. Chomsky is the expert on how the ‘consent’ of the powerless majority is ‘manufactured’, including by a kept corporate media. From there it is a short journey to an “embedded press” in

zones of foreign military occupation, and to gag laws that curtail domestic dissent and put swarthy immigrants and selfless lawyers like Lynne Stewart in jail.

Long before anti-communism was invented, the US rulers employed their own aggressive nationalism against the aspirations of defenseless, oppressed nations. Now it's the "war on terrorism," which was well underway but benefited by a big boost after September 11, 2001. "Clinton's bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998 effectively created Al Qaeda," says Chomsky.

The price tag for this manufactured war is manifold, including the reality that "Forty-five million Americans have no (health care) coverage whatsoever." Add to that "thirty years of either stagnation or decline in real wages, with people working longer hours with fewer benefits." While "Household debt is out of sight ... corporate debt is very low. In fact, corporations are making huge profits" and "barely pay taxes." Money for militarism is diverted from already disintegrating public schools, hospitals, roads, and water services.

Next on the chopping block is Social Security, which Americans are being falsely told they cannot afford because they are living too long. The author asks, "Who paid for (the baby boomers) when they were newborns until they were twenty?" In "the 1960s, when this generation was coming of age, in fact there was a huge increase in funding for schools and other programs for children, at a time when the government had less income than it has today."

So what's behind the drive to destroy Social Security and all the rest? The book argues it's a drive to reverse the past gains won by labour and other social movements, to the benefit of Wall Street and the capitalist fraternity, who use 'national security' propaganda to dull our senses.

You might ask, is the 'war on terrorism' turning the US into 'a failed state'? And who will come to the rescue, if not the awakened ranks of the other global super-power, the vast legions of anti-war, progressive humanity, including its potentially explosive US section?

Such an awakening, the stirrings of which were evident in the massive immigrants' rights protests across America on May 1, 2006, need to be nurtured by teachings that promote political independence from the institutions of capitalist rule. Herein lies a fundamental weakness of the work at hand.

Chomsky's indignation at the Empire's crimes dissolves disappointingly into the poisonous brine of lesser-evil politics. Hardly pausing for breathe, after exposing the 'liberal' Bill Clinton edition of anti-democratic subversion and military aggression, Chomsky the self-conscious libertarian lobbies for votes... for the Democratic Party — which for well over a century has been the main war party of US imperialism. After devoting thousands of pages, and a myriad of examples of the fundamental similarity and common class loyalties of the Democrats and Republicans, Chomsky feebly submits:

“These may not look like huge differences, but they translate into quite big effects for the lives of people. Anybody who says, ‘I don’t care if Bush gets elected’ is basically telling poor and working people in the country, ‘I don’t care if your lives are destroyed.’”

But who destroyed the lives of over 50,000 US soldiers (not to mention millions of Vietnamese), and who cut welfare, health care and education in favour of more cops and jails in America if not the Democrats? And who joined the nearly unanimous vote in Congress to invade Iraq and Afghanistan, and who are amongst the front rank of loyal supporters of Zionist apartheid, anti-Cuba terrorism, militarism and subversion of democracy from Indonesia to Somalia to Venezuela?

Chomsky reveals that his “views grew out of the anarcho-syndicalist tradition.” He affirms his “belief in the value of classical liberal doctrines ... Enlightenment ideals — rationality, critical analysis, freedom of speech, freedom of inquiry.” In this way he exposes the extreme limitation of his outlook and “ideals”. He does this ... insofar as he fails to challenge the political monopoly exercised by the capitalist minority ... insofar as he capitulates to at least one of the lying, cheating, murderous political gangs of the plutocracy ... and insofar as Chomsky declines even to speculate on the prospect of working class self-emancipation, an essential step towards which would be the formation of an independent party based on working class organizations and a set of policies that would advance the basic class interests of the overwhelming majority of Americans. That is the tragedy that dulls the brilliance of Chomsky’s body of work, these two books being no exception

Tariq Ali. *Pirates of the Caribbean, Axis of Hope*. Verso. London and New York, 2006. 244 pages

Tariq Ali, radical pundit, novelist, film maker, political agitator and a former leader of the Trotskyist movement in Britain, shows how the abject failure of the neo-liberal agenda in Latin America has radicalized a new generation and given rise to a series of radical regime challengers to the capitalist status quo.

His focus on Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia, for obvious reasons, could not be more timely.

Though some cynics try to liken Hugo Chavez to yesteryear’s Argentinean populist dictator Juan Peron, Washington seems to know better. It has again and again attempted, through its local henchmen, to remove the repeatedly re-elected Venezuelan President, and to derail the Bolivarian revolutionary process.

Venezuela’s considerable oil wealth is not new, but the determination of the movement led by Chavez to conquer poverty, illiteracy and disease, and to build an integrated Latin American counter-weight to the US in the form of a continental fair trade and cooperation pact (ALBA) is. It is rightly seen as a serious threat to imperial interests. Combine that with a vision of “twenty-first century socialism” and plans taking shape to replace the bourgeois state with “communal councils,” then add the construction of a unitary grass roots revolutionary socialist party to lead

the transition to socialism in Venezuela, firmly allied to revolutionary Cuba, and you have the makings of an epic confrontation with Washington.

Tariq Ali presents his own global balance sheet.

“On the credit side (for the US rulers), ... China ... remains as mute as Russia, India and Eastern Europe.... the EU is firmly back on side.”

“On the debit side, American control of the Middle East is slipping.” And in Latin America, “new social movements had thrown up new political leaders. They were insisting that, despite the fall of the Soviet Union, the world as still confronted with old choices. Either a revamped global capitalism with new wars and new impoverishment, chaos, anarchy or a rethought and revived socialism, democratic in character and capable of serving the needs of the poor.”

Ali’s ambiguity about whether the social democratic wealth-redistributing policies of Venezuela, joined last year by Bolivia’s President Evo Morales, and now by Ecuador and Nicaragua, will be sufficient to empower the masses and break the imperial stranglehold, is definitely a weakness.

But his failure to articulate what is to be done (apart from organizing international solidarity) does not negate the value of his vivid portrayal of the cowardly, short-sighted, narcissistic, decadent Venezuelan business elite. Ali’s treatment of one Teodor Petkoff, a socialist turned neo-liberal who edits the venomous anti-Chavez daily *Tal Cual* (As It Is), is a highlight of his tragic-comic account.

Valuable too is Ali’s sketch of Simon Bolivar, the nineteenth century liberator of Spain’s American domain, his enduring relationship with his revolutionary atheist tutor Simon Rodriguez, and to Manuela Saenz, Bolivar’s lover and political soul-mate. The story touches down in Haiti where the first revolution that overthrew slavery and French colonial rule enabled Bolivar to take respite there. He resumed his long military campaign against Spain in 1817 after being supplied with food, money and arms by Haitian revolutionary leader Alexandre Petion. May Venezuela soon return the favour!

Bolivia became Che Guevara’s grave yard in 1967 when he was betrayed by the Stalinist Communist Party and suffered isolation from the indigenous people in the rural interior. In contrast, the mass mobilization of urban and rural laborers of Aymara descent, along with some of the reduced ranks of the industrial proletariat, rich in revolutionary tradition, combined to bring down the neo-liberal Sanchez de Lozada regime in 2003. These forces then catapulted Evo Morales into the presidency in December 2005, the first fully indigenous person to hold such an office in Bolivia or on the continent. Triumphant visits to Havana and Caracas signaled the beginning of a wave of change in terms of literacy and health care services, the nationalization of gas and oil resources, the start of land reform and a re-write of the constitution to integrate and empower the indigenous, historically excluded, majority.

Pirates of the Caribbean persuasively depicts a situation pregnant with revolution, and thus with hope, despite the book's failure to outline a strategy for their realization.

Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston, New York, 2006. 406 pages

Dawkins, a science professor at Oxford University, caused a stir in Canada when he appeared on a CBC-TV Newsworld debate show recently. The fact that his book went to number one on the best seller charts really rankled the defenders of blind faith.

Dawkins, trying not to take himself too seriously, makes the case that it is impossible to know absolutely whether God exists, only that the existence of God is extremely improbable.

He defines an atheist as "somebody who believes there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world, no supernatural creative intelligence lurking behind the observable universe, no soul that outlasts the body and no miracles — except in the sense of natural phenomenon that we don't yet understand."

Early on he quotes Albert Einstein, who theists often wrongly claim as one of theirs:

"Nature is a magnificent structure that we can comprehend only very imperfectly, and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility. This is a genuinely religious feeling that has nothing to do with mysticism. The idea of a personal God is quite alien to me and seems even naive."

Some philosophers who wish to cling to a thread of mysticism argue for the 'lazy God' theory, akin to the notions of the eighteenth century deists: God created the universe, then stood back and let everything take its own course. Of course, this doesn't exactly make a strong case for worship or prayer, since the deity is decidedly inactive, unoccupied and superfluous.

But like all other God theories it still begs the really big question: Who or what created God? Dawkins puts it this way: "A God capable of continuously monitoring and controlling the individual status of every particle in the universe cannot be simple. His existence is going to need a mammoth explanation in its own right."

Theists, bereft of scientific proof for their beliefs, often find it more convenient to go on the offensive. 'Intelligent design' proponents (who seek to re-write school science text books) aim to put a sophisticated face on hokey creationism. Some argue: How could complex life, including complex organisms like the human eye, occur? If not by design, did they occur just by chance?

Dawkins' retort is effective:

"Design is not the only alternative to chance. Natural selection is a better alternative. Indeed, design is not a real alternative at all because it raises an even bigger problem than it solves: who designed the designer? Chance and design both fail as solutions to the problem of statistical probability, because one of them is the problem, and the other one regresses to it. Natural selection is a real solution a solution of stunning elegance and

power natural selection is a cumulative process, which breaks the problem of improbability up into small pieces. Each of the small pieces is slightly improbable, but not prohibitively so.

“The creationist completely misses the point, because he insists on treating the genesis of statistical improbability as a single, one-off event. He doesn’t understand the power of accumulation.”

To illustrate his point, Dawkins goes on to discuss the primitive eye of the flatworm, and the somewhat more complicated eye of the nautilus, as steps on a continuum.

The God Delusion would be glaringly incomplete without paying a lot of attention to the various ideologies of delusion. He examines the huge scriptural contradictions within Christianity, and suggests that this is also the case for the multitude of other religions. He excoriates the vicious cruelty sanctioned by faith — the intense bigotry, oppressive discrimination, and blatant female and child abuse perpetuated in its various names.

For the purposes of generating a civilized society, Dawkins maintains, humanity has no need of the irrational crutch of ages, that we are quite capable of respecting individual and collective rights on a secular basis — in fact humanity is much more capable of doing so free of religious baggage. The book is brimming with delightful quotes that promote critical thinking. “When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion it is called Religion.”

Alas, Dawkins is not a historical materialist. When he strays into the realm of politics and sociology, he tends to reduce national oppression to a matter of pure religious bigotry. Whether it concerns Irish nationalists in the British-occupied Orange statelet, or Palestinians under Zionist occupation, or Arabs and Muslims suffering harassment in North America and Europe, Dawkins fails to see, or at least to explain, that in capitalist class society the ruling elite fosters bigotry in an effort to justify social inequality, to lower their costs, to maximize their profits, and to divide so as to rule.

He does not attempt to explain the origins of Christianity, Islam, or any religion as an expression of distinct class interests at their genesis. One must look elsewhere for that, such as in Karl Kautsky’s seminal *Foundations of Christianity* (1908).

The God Delusion is an informed, articulate, humanist response to irrational, reactionary ideologies. It does not purport to be a guide to the new world that free thinking humanity yearns to create. Nor should it be regarded as an impediment to collaboration with Liberation Theologists, anti-imperialist Muslims or anti-Zionist Jews.

But it is an important component of what activists need today — ammunition against the Empire.

Editors’ Note: Other leftwing reviewers have been much more critical of *The God Delusion*. Readers may find these reviews of interest: *Canadian Charger*; *London Review of Books*; *International Socialism*

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Venezuela Shakes the Empire

Why Socialists Support the Bolivarian Struggle for Sovereignty and Latin American Unity

By John Riddell

Why do socialists in Canada support the Venezuelan revolution?

There is much to admire about Venezuela today: impressive mass mobilizations, community and labour activism, significant social gains, an inspiring commitment to a socialist future.

But Venezuela's importance today to the workers' movement lies above all in the leading role it is playing in a new upsurge of anti-imperialist struggles internationally.

This is not always easy for socialists in advanced capitalist countries to understand. We tend to interpret Venezuela in terms of our own experience of workers' struggle against exploitative bosses and corrupt, repressive governments. We are often less sensitive to the aspects of Venezuela that are different, particularly its oppression by world imperialism, the impact this has on Venezuelan society, and how Venezuela is fighting back against the Empire.

Consider what Venezuela's revolutionary government has accomplished in the 12 weeks since the Bolivarian movement led by Hugo Chávez won an overwhelming victory in its presidential election. A brief selection:

- Venezuela has reached agreements with newly elected anti-imperialist presidents Rafael Correa (Ecuador) and Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua) for assistance to these countries.
- Nicaragua and three Caribbean nations (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and St. Vincent) have joined the Venezuelan-initiated Bolivarian Agreement for the Americas (ALBA), a framework for resistance to imperialist domination, which also includes Cuba and Bolivia. Ecuador has also signaled its intention to join the alliance.
- Significantly, Venezuelan and Cuban aid to Nicaragua includes significant projects in its autonomous Caribbean coast regions, home to most of its indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. Hugo Chávez has stressed that its vision of socialism is "indigenous," stressing the leading role of indigenous peoples in popular resistance across much of Latin America.
- Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad strengthened their countries' alliance against the threatened U.S. attack on Iran during Ahmadinejad's January 14 visit to Caracas. The two presidents promised to spend billions of dollars to aid peoples "resisting U.S. domination.
- Venezuela utilized a U.S.-sponsored resolution in the United Nations condemning denial of the Holocaust, intended to isolate Iran, to reaffirm its solidarity with the embattled peoples of the Middle East. Venezuelan delegate Marco Palavicini declared that Israel's

excesses have “led to a new holocaust against the Palestinian people,” while “hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis” also “are victims of a holocaust.”

- On January 22, at a meeting of Latin American presidents, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and Bolivia’s Evo Morales called for transformation of the Brazilian-led MERCOSUR trade bloc. Chávez declared his intent to “decontaminate it of neoliberalism.”

The sustained efforts of Venezuelan and allied popular movements have struck major blows to neoliberalism, the attempt by the U.S. and allied imperialist governments to qualitatively increase their economic domination and exploitation of Latin America. The U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) has been rebuffed; the grip of the International Monetary Fund on national budgets has been weakened and in some cases broken. The upsurge of mass struggles has strengthened the sovereignty and unity of Latin American peoples.

Bolivarian Goal

The Venezuelans call this vision of Latin America emancipation “Bolivarianism,” after Simon Bolívar (1783-1830), leader of South America’s struggle for independence from Spain. In 1995, long before his election to the Venezuelan presidency, Chávez referred to Bolívar’s “notion of uniting all these balkanized territories of Latin America in order to confront the imperial power to the north.” (Gott, pages 183-84)

Since the days of José Martí (1853-1895), Cuban revolutionaries have been inspired by this Bolivarian ideal. In 1961, Fidel Castro gave it renewed expression in the Second Declaration of Havana:

“Today Latin America lies beneath an imperialism, much more fierce, much more powerful, and more cruel than the Spanish colonial empire,” the declaration stated. “This great humanity has said, ‘Enough!’ and has begun to march. And their giant march will not be halted until they conquer true independence.” (Lyons, pages 108, 130; and www.walterlippmann.com/fc-02-04-1962.html)

Cuba has never retreated from that stand. Thirty-nine years later, Fidel Castro, warning against the FTAA, said “We must revive Bolívar’s dignity and his dreams.” Rather than being “devoured by the decadent empire,” Latin America and the Caribbean “must integrate and unite in search of a greater and more dignified destiny.” (Castro, page 106)

Oppressed and Oppressor Nations

The same goal of unity against imperialist domination has been central to Marxism for a century. In 1920, the Communist International proclaimed the slogan, “Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!”

Lenin explained the thinking behind that slogan to the International’s second congress that year:

“The characteristic feature of imperialism consists in the whole world, as we now see, being divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, the latter possessing colossal wealth and powerful armed forces.”

Lenin included among the oppressed nations not only direct colonial dependencies but also “semi-colonies as, for example, Persia, Turkey, and China” and also countries that had become dependent on imperialist powers through conquest. (Riddell, page 212)

Since Lenin’s time, many Latin American countries have undergone considerable industrial development. For example, a Brazilian corporation, Embraer, is now the main aerospace competitor of Canada’s Bombardier. A huge Brazilian mining concern, PVRD — once state-owned but privatized in 1997 — bought Canadian nickel-mining giant Inco in 2006. Mexican telecommunications tycoon Carlos Slim is rated the world’s third-richest man.

Brazilian capitalists have regional ambitions, expressed in their hostility to Bolivia’s measures to reclaim its natural resources from foreign control. Brazil is a lead player in the brutal United Nations occupation of Haiti, in which Bolivian and Canadian forces have also participated.

Reactionary forces in Latin America appeal to nationalism — for example, in denouncing Venezuela’s international aid programs as squandering resources that ought to be spent within the country.

For socialists in Canada, this has a familiar ring. Many socialists here, especially in Quebec, view Canadian nationalism with suspicion. As a political force, it has served mainly to build support for Canadian imperialism, its oppression over Quebecois and indigenous peoples at home, and its wars and interventions abroad.

This concern leads many Marxists in this country to view the national and anti-imperialist dimension of the current Latin American upsurge with reserve. Is nationalism in Latin America really any different?

There is a danger here of applying to Latin American and Caribbean societies an analysis appropriate to developed, imperialist countries like Canada. In fact, “development” in Latin American countries has followed a very different course, and the contrast has not diminished in recent decades. This is shown by the very different impact neoliberalism has had in Latin America and in the imperialist heartlands.

Mexican Example

Nowhere has the contrast been so clear as in the course of neoliberalism in Canada and Mexico, both of whose economies have been yoked together with that of the U.S. since 1994 in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In both countries, the neoliberal capitalist offensive has shifted wealth from poor to rich, cut back government social programs, and cost many workers their livelihood. But after two decades of struggle, Canada’s economic and social structure has not changed significantly, while Mexico has been severely damaged.

The advent of neoliberalism in Mexico began with an economic crisis in the early 1980s that led its government to appeal to Washington and the International Monetary Fund for financial aid. The U.S. demanded, and obtained, the gutting of the Mexico's substantial nationalized sector and government economic controls. Real wages fell 30% in the 1980s.

The advent of NAFTA devastated Mexican peasant agriculture and manufacturing for the local market. The proportion of working people with formal jobs fell. Workers' living standards declined sharply and have continued to slide. The migration of a desperate population into the U.S. reached massive proportions. And in recent years, the pride of neoliberalism—the “maquiladores” sector producing exclusively for export — is also in trouble.

The deep wounds suffered by Mexico's working population found expression in massive uprisings in 2006, including demonstrations of millions against electoral fraud organized by the country's ruling oligarchy.

The Line is Still Drawn

Not even the weakest imperialist countries were crippled by the neoliberal offensive, but economies across Latin America suffered severe damage. This outcome made it clear that the line between oppressed and oppressor nations is still sharply drawn at Mexico's northern frontier.

Gross Domestic Product per capita in major Latin American countries ranges from only 15% (Venezuela) to 25% (Mexico) of U.S. levels, with the now gravely damaged Argentinian economy showing higher at 35%. Economic inequality is greater than almost anywhere else in the world. Many countries are marked by vast rural poverty. A high proportion of the working class subsists in the “informal economy.” The oppressed and marginalized indigenous population is a majority in several countries and a powerful force in many more.

Even the most “developed” Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, suffer from structural deformations that are a product of imperialist domination of their economies and their particular insertion in the world market. Brazil's notorious social polarization, dividing the opulent rich from the impoverished masses in rural areas and urban slums, is evidence of this problem.

It's true that reactionary governments in Latin America, as in Canada, often clothe themselves in nationalist demagogy to justify class rule. But progressive and popular movements in Latin America are also frequently national, in a different sense — in seeking liberation from imperialist domination. It is vital that socialist and working class forces seek to lead such movements and strive to win them to a program in the interests of working people — and that their allies in imperialist countries support them in this challenge.

Resistance to Imperialism

Popular resistance movements in Latin America typically begin as struggles against the local oligarchy and for democracy and the rights of working people, and for access to basic services

such as water, schools, and health clinics. But to the degree that these movements have won influence over segments of the government, such as national presidencies, the focus has changed toward using governmental power to win back the ground lost to neoliberalism and toward regional alliances to provide a firmer basis to resist imperialist pressure. A recent increase in the prices of many Latin American exports, particularly oil, has aided this process.

Mass movements marked by a clear class polarization have given rise to governments that preside over a capitalist state and take measures for structural reform within capitalism. Such governments vary enormously in character. Some are prone to cave in to the pressures of imperialism and local pro-imperialist sectors. To some degree, and in some countries, there has been a shift in the locus of action from the streets to government.

But the development as a whole is not a step backward. Rather, the counterattack against neoliberalism is profoundly progressive—a struggle to realize of the goals for which tens of thousands demonstrated in Quebec City in 2001. Above all, Latin American countries are asserting and realizing their sovereignty against foreign domination. The Empire has been forced into retreat. Improved conditions are being won for national economic development. Even if this process does not go beyond capitalism, it creates better conditions of life and struggle for working people and deserves wholehearted support by socialists everywhere.

But the mass upsurge in Latin America has the potential to go beyond the capitalist framework. Tens of millions of working people are gaining in confidence, recapturing hope for a better future, and setting higher goals for social change. And in the process, socialism is being once again discussed not merely by narrow radical circles but by millions of working people.

Latin American working people deserve our support in their efforts to win all the gains possible within capitalism. But history warns against any reliance on capitalism's ability to provide durable economic development in a manner favorable to working people. Economic dependency plagued the region long before the advent of neoliberalism. Previous attempts to encourage economic development in Latin America of energetic government intervention have collapsed under pressure of world capitalist markets or have been cut short by U.S.-orchestrated military coups.

Capitalism in Latin America cannot escape the trends toward increased exploitation, environmental degradation, and war that characterize this brutal system in every sector of the world. Indeed, the Latin American mass movements are part of the worldwide test of strength with imperialism, whose main focus, at present, is the U.S.-led wars and occupations in the Middle East.

It is thus significant that the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela has gone beyond the vision of Latin American integration and sovereignty to embrace the goal of 21st century socialism. A broad discussion has opened up on the nature of socialism and the road to its realization, which socialists internationally welcome and participate in.

As mass movements strengthen, they pose the possibility of establishing a revolutionary popular government, based on mobilized workers, farmers, indigenous peoples, and other oppressed sectors, and acting in their interests. Such governments can enable the masses to overcome major obstacles in their advance towards overturning capitalist power and establishing socialism.

But while socialism represents the Latin American movement's future, its present focus remains resistance to imperialism, Latin American and indigenous unity, and associated demands for democratic and grassroots participatory rights and indigenous empowerment.

These struggles deserve the understanding and strong support of progressive activists around the world.

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