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U.S. Prepares Large-Scale Assault on Iran

Mass Protests Can Stop The War Makers

By Robert Johnson

In November, Americans elected a Democratic majority in Congress as a way of registering their protest against the war in Iraq. On January 27 several hundreds of thousands marched in Washington D.C. and other cities calling for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. Yet, defying public opinion, U.S. President George Bush is now reinforcing his bloody occupation of Iraq and planning to extend the war to Iran. The military preparations for a large-scale air and sea assault on Iran are nearly complete. Meanwhile the White House is working overtime to manufacture a rationale for its aggression.

The headlong rush into a wider war has alarmed some members of the American ruling class.

Testifying before the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate on February 1, former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski sounded a sharp warning:

“The war in Iraq is a historic, strategic, and moral calamity. Undertaken under false assumptions, it is undermining America’s global legitimacy. ... It is intensifying regional instability.... If the United States continues to be bogged down in a protracted bloody involvement in Iraq, the final destination on this downhill track is likely to be a head-on conflict with Iran and with much of the world of Islam at large.” (Emphasis in original)

In his public testimony Brzezinski went so far as to set out “a plausible scenario for a military collision with Iran,” namely “Iraqi failure to meet the benchmarks; followed by accusations of Iranian responsibility for the failure; then by some provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the U.S. blamed on Iran; culminating in a ‘defensive’ U.S. military action against Iran that plunges a lonely America into a spreading and deepening quagmire eventually ranging across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.”

The course of events since the beginning of this year suggest that momentum is building toward a large-scale imperialist attack on Iran, following exactly the scenario laid out by Brzezinski.

Iraq Study Group

Ever since they ordered the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had doggedly insisted that they were winning the war in Iraq. As time wore on fewer and fewer people, both in the American population and within the ruling class, continued to believe in this fiction. Many in the ruling class sought some kind of course correction.

The publication of a report by the Iraq Study Group (ISG) on December 6 brought this debate to a head. The panel was composed of ten prominent figures, five from each of the ruling parties. Its co-chairmen were former Secretary of State James Baker, an intimate of the Bush family for decades and former congressman Lee Hamilton, who also co-chaired the government commission that investigated the events of September 11, 2001.

The ISG sounded a loud alarm over the looming failure of the war in Iraq. The U.S. position there was “grave and deteriorating” it stated. “If the situation continues to deteriorate, the consequences could be severe.”

This assessment met with general approval within the ruling class. Indeed Rumsfeld, the personification of the “don’t worry, be happy” line, had been unceremoniously thrown overboard the day after the election.

What should the U.S. do? The ISG panel unanimously recommended a radical policy reorientation: that the U.S. scale down its aims in Iraq and negotiate a regional agreement with governments such as Syria and Iran.

This proposal provoked a sharp debate within the ruling class in late December, most of it behind closed doors. The decision that emerged was to reject the ISG proposal. Iraq is viewed as too important, the consequences of admitting defeat are too horrible to contemplate, and — whatever the problems, and they are serious — the U.S. has not been definitively defeated in Iraq.

One of imperialism’s major concerns about the impasse in Iraq is the way that it is weakening its client regimes in the region and strengthening Iran. The fears of these Middle Eastern rulers is palpable; the successes of Hezbollah against Israel in the war in Lebanon last summer also weakened their position. A negotiated settlement in Iraq would be widely understood as an admission of U.S. failure.

Such a deal would also require major concessions to Iran, including on the nuclear question, and at this point there is no sign that any section of the U.S. ruling class is prepared to contemplate such a deal. The Israeli rulers would also strenuously object, and their interests must also be taken into account.

Bush's 'Surge' Targets Iran

With the status quo in Iraq untenable, Bush chose to implement a far-reaching escalation of the war.

His first move was to reshuffle the military high command, promoting commanders who would apply his new policy. He then revealed the policy in a speech on January 10.

The most publicized aspect of the new approach was to increase the number of U.S. military forces in Iraq by 21,500. These troops will augment a U.S. occupation force numbering approximately 130,000, backed up by a large number of paramilitary private security contractors (estimated at 50,000 to 100,000), working either directly for the U.S. government or for companies enjoying lucrative contracts under the occupation regime.

This small increment to the occupation forces — the largest number that could be mustered under current political conditions in the U.S. — is not likely to alter the course of the war in Iraq. It does however signal the U.S. rulers' refusal to concede defeat.

The more important — and ominous — element of the new policy was the threat to extend the war to Iran and Syria.

In his speech Bush repeatedly charged that Iran and Syria were arming and training insurgents in Iraq. He pledged to retaliate: "We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq."

Ever since the speech, the Western mass media have been parroting the steady stream of accusations from the administration blaming Syria and particularly Iran for the U.S.'s problems in Iraq. They played the same role of propagandists for the drive to war in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq.

Bush's charges against Iran in his January 10 speech were part of a pattern of words and deeds designed to set the stage for military action against Iran. Some of these include:

- On January 26 the Washington Post revealed that last fall Bush authorized U.S. forces in Iraq to hunt down and kill Iranian government personnel operating in Iraq. The "kill or capture" program also includes other measures aimed at destabilizing the government in Tehran.
- The day after Bush's speech, U.S. armed forces raided the Iranian consulate in Irbil, seizing five employees. The attack violated Iraqi and Iranian sovereignty and even the Iraqi government, which depends on U.S. support, protested the action.
- In mid February the aircraft carrier battle group USS Stennis entered the waters off the coast of Iran, en route to the Persian Gulf, where it will join the USS Eisenhower battle

group. Both groups are armed with nuclear weapons. The last time two such carrier battle groups were stationed in the gulf was in early 2003, just before the invasion of Iraq. Twenty percent of the world's oil supply is shipped through the narrow waterway.

- Patriot missile batteries have been supplied to several gulf states allied to the U.S. to strengthen their air defenses against possible Iranian retaliation.
- According to an article by the investigative journalist Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker magazine last April, U.S. special forces were already active at that time inside Iran, collecting information on possible targets. Iranian authorities have recently charged that an attack on a bus carrying military recruits was carried out by a terrorist group backed by the U.S. and operating from Pakistan.

“Preparations for Invading Iran Are Complete”

The British magazine *New Statesman* reported on February 19 that:

“American preparations for invading Iran are complete. ... American military operations for a major conventional war with Iran could be implemented any day. They extend far beyond targeting suspect WMD [Weapons of Mass Destruction] facilities and will enable President Bush to destroy Iran's military, political and economic infrastructure overnight using conventional weapons.”

“British military sources told the *New Statesman*, on condition of anonymity, that ‘the U.S. military switched its whole focus to Iran’ as soon as Saddam Hussein was kicked out of Baghdad. It continued this strategy, even though it had American infantry bogged down in fighting the insurgency in Iraq...

“The Bush administration has made much of sending a second aircraft carrier to the Gulf. But it is a tiny part of the preparations. Post 9/11, the US navy can put six carriers into battle at a month's notice.... Each carrier force includes hundreds of cruise missiles....

“Several marine forces are [also] assembling, each with its own aircraft carrier. These carrier forces can each conduct a version of the D-Day landings. They come with landing craft, tanks, jump-jets, thousands of troops and, yes, hundreds more cruise missiles. Their task is to destroy Iranian forces able to attack oil tankers and to secure oilfields and installations. They have trained for this mission since the Iranian revolution of 1979....

“Any U.S. general planning to attack Iran can now assume that at least 10,000 targets can be hit in a single raid, with warplanes flying from the U.S. or Diego Garcia. In the past year, unlimited funding for military technology has taken ‘smart bombs’ to a new level....

“The whole of Iran is now less than an hour's flying time from some American base or carrier. Sources in the region as well as trade journals confirm that the U.S. has built three bases in Azerbaijan that could be transit points for troops and with facilities equal to its best in Europe.”

Limits of U.S. Power

Bush's decision to target Iran is a logical extension of his decision to invade Iraq.

Domination of the Middle East and control over its oil has been a central pillar of American foreign policy for more than half a century. But the world of today is very different from that of 1945, when U.S. imperialism emerged from World War Two as the greatest victor, towering over all its imperialist rivals. In recent decades the U.S. has suffered a steady decline in its industrial and financial strength relative to other major powers. It faces rising competition from many quarters, further eroding profit rates. The international financial system is increasingly unstable; an ever-greater proportion of wealth is derived through various forms of financial manipulation.

Militarily, however, the United States stands far above all other states in the size and technology of its armed forces. More and more it is turning to this military superiority to compensate for its economic decline.

In the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, many of the most vocal proponents of the war openly proclaimed that their goal was to "remake the Middle East." They intended to deliver an object lesson to the peoples of the region — and beyond — that it was futile to resist American imperialism. In so doing the U.S. would not only control Iraq's oil and natural resources, it would exercise a much stronger sway over the resources of the entire region. This would give it huge leverage over its competitors in Europe and Asia whose economies are dependent on access to Middle Eastern oil.

Things have turned out quite differently. The Iraqi people have fought the occupiers to a standstill. At tremendous cost and suffering they have prevented imperialism from taking full control of the country. The object lesson of Iraq, visible to the whole world, has turned out to be a demonstration of the weakness of U.S. imperialism.

The Iraqi people's struggle against the occupation has stiffened the resolve of other fighters against imperialism in the Middle East and beyond. It has made it more difficult for the imperialist powers to achieve their goals in Afghanistan. And with the American military engaged in Iraq, the U.S. has been limited in its ability to intervene against the rising tide of popular struggles in Latin America.

Incapable of fully dominating Iraq, Washington has turned to a strategy of deliberately destabilizing Iraqi society, actively promoting sectarian violence and ethnic divisions. By sowing chaos and destruction they hope to prevent the Iraqi people from regaining control of their own country, and to prevent U.S. competitors from gaining access to Iraq's resources.

Stalemated in Iraq but still committed to its goal of dominating the Middle East, Bush and company are now preparing to take on a larger and more important objective: Iran.

Target Iran

Before 1979, the Iranian government under Shah Muhammad-Reza Palavi was the policeman for imperialism in the region, with 200,000 troops trained and equipped by the Western powers. It also intervened to prop up neighboring reactionary regimes. The real power in the country was the U.S. embassy and 20,000 U.S. "advisors." As a loyal servant of Washington and its allies, the

shah turned over much of the country's wealth to foreign investors while operating a vast police network that brutally crushed internal dissent.

Popular hatred of the shah's dictatorship led to a wave of strikes and street protests lasting many months that culminated in mass insurrections in Tehran and other cities in early 1979. After a number of bloody clashes the shah's army and repressive apparatus melted away. This was one of the deepest revolutions of the twentieth century, and it transformed Iranian society profoundly.

The Iranian people regained sovereignty over their own country and began to undertake urgently needed reforms, for example extending literacy and health care programs to rural and less developed areas of the country. The rate of illiteracy in Iran has declined from 52.5 per cent in 1976 to 24 per cent in 2002. Women have particularly benefited from these measures. Iran broke all ties with Israel and called on all Islamic countries to unite in struggle against U.S. imperialism and Zionism.

Imperialism has never forgiven the Iranian people for their "crime" of overthrowing a U.S.-backed dictator. Washington in particular has followed a policy of unrelenting pressure and aggression against Iran. It quickly reacted to the revolution with an economic embargo that continues to this day. It encouraged its ally Saddam Hussein to invade Iran in 1980, and it supported the Iraqi assault through an eight-year war that cost the lives of an estimated one million people.

Contrary to the impression given in the Western mass media — and echoed by much of the left — Iran today is a rather modern society, more socially and technologically advanced than many Third World countries. Its 70 million people are justifiably proud of their achievements and their relative independence from imperialism.

Iran is ruled by a capitalist government that aims for some kind of accommodation with the western powers. This government represses dissent. However, many of the gains of the revolution remain intact, and this is reflected in Iran's positions on various international questions. Iran stands shoulder to shoulder with anti-imperialist fighters in Lebanon, in the West Bank and Gaza, and in Iraq; it not only supports them politically but in many cases it provides material support. Iranian government officials have also voiced their nation's solidarity with Latin American countries shaking free of the grip of Uncle Sam.

There are many social movements in Iran, some of them opposed to the present government. But all Iran stands united against the threatened U.S. assault. (See Socialist Voice #93)

The U.S.-led outcry against nuclear power in Iran is shameless hypocrisy, exposed by U.S. acceptance of not just reactors but nuclear weaponry in neighbouring Pakistan and Israel, not to mention in the U.S. bases and ships that surround Iran. Washington's real objection is to Iran's successful defiance, and the example this sets for the world.

Moreover, the U.S. government now looks to war on Iran as the best way to escape defeat in Iraq. Devastate Iran, shatter its state, overthrow its government, seize its oil resources, and

fragment the country — in short, the Iraq model for destruction of a resistant society and strengthening the U.S. military stranglehold on the region.

‘Troops Out of Iraq, Hands Off Iran’

Despite the late hour, a U.S. attack on Iran is not inevitable. Mass protests, particularly in the United States, can stay the hand of the war makers.

Significant antiwar actions are scheduled to take place on March 17, an international day of action against the war in Iraq. In Canada the Canadian Peace Alliance is organizing actions across the country on that day against the wars of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan. These protests provide an excellent occasion to also demand “U.S. hands off Iran”

Socialist Voice #155, March 12, 2007

Afghanistan: No Gender Equality Under Occupation

Supporters of the occupation of Afghanistan often argue that the NATO force is liberating women from the oppression they suffered under the Taliban. The Harper government, no supporter of women's rights in Canada, recently promoted that view by sending Governor General Michaëlle Jean on a well-publicized visit to Afghanistan on International Women's Day. In following report from Kabul, originally published in Green Left Weekly, Ramani Desilva argues that the liberation of Afghan women can only be accomplished by the women themselves. An important step towards that goal will be complete withdrawal of the occupying army.

by Ramani Desilva

KABUL — The new constitution of Afghanistan formally grants equal rights to women and men. The government has also endorsed the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which, according to development agencies, is significant progress on gender equality “policy advocacy.” The first time I arrived in Kabul the women I saw on the streets were wearing scarves on their heads and those wearing full chador were a minority. Maybe, at a superficial glance, the situation had improved for the women of Afghanistan?

The propaganda of the NATO occupation forces made the “liberation” of women synonymous with the “liberation” of the country from the Taliban. The ministry of women's affairs was set up and much publicised for international consumption as the changing face of a “liberated” Afghanistan. The ministry has become the pet project of many development agencies. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Laura Bush are patrons of the US-Afghan Women's Council, which supports women's “leadership” training and micro-credit projects.

But the situation outside Kabul and the heavily guarded zones of the development agencies, whose staff are penned in day and night due to tight security provisions, is extremely unstable and volatile. There is a constant feeling of uneasiness that the situation could explode at any moment, including in Kabul itself. During my stay there was a mortar attack on Jalalabad Road, one of the main highways and army convoy routes out of Kabul. There are reports of Kabul airport coming under frequent gunfire attack. The plane that was flying me out of Kabul taxied down the runway ready for take off, then suddenly slowed down, U-turned and returned to the terminal. The pilot explained that there were some “technical difficulties,” which we found out later was a broken windscreen. “Maybe someone took a shot at us,” said a UN security officer, wryly. But no-one was laughing.

The government has no influence or control over the country and President Hamid Karzai is laughingly referred to as the “mayor of Kabul.” Almost half the country is deemed high to extreme risk areas, i.e. in UN parlance, a “volatile” to “hostile environment.” This includes almost all of the southern and eastern parts of the country along the borders with Pakistan. These are war zones where there is ongoing fighting between NATO troops and Taliban forces, drug lords and other Afghan-style criminals and gangsters.

According to some workers I spoke to, the resistance is widespread and not only limited to the Taliban, due to the inability of the government to deliver any improvements to the lives of the vast majority of the population. Poppy production linked to the drug economy has resurfaced with a vengeance, and many government officials are implicated. Some development agencies are reluctant to set up banks as these could be used for laundering drug money.

Afghanistan ranks 173 out of 178 on the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index (2004). Life expectancy today is approximately 44.5 years. One out of five children dies before the age of five and maternal mortality is among the highest in the world. Some 90% of adult women are illiterate. Some 75% of girls attending primary school drop out before grade five. Newly re-opened girls' schools are closing down due to violence against women and girls. Stories are told of how young women today are less educated than those belonging to their grandmothers' generation. Sexual violence against girls, institutionalised through "traditions" such as child marriage, continues to be rife. Suicide among young women is said to be increasing. A May 2006 United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) survey on violence against women in Afghanistan indicates that it's widespread, extreme, systematic and unreported.

Women development staff working outside Kabul frequently receive death threats. Some have even been killed. In September 2006 Safiye Amajan, the provincial head of the women's ministry in Kandahar and a respected women's rights advocate, was shot repeatedly outside her home as she was leaving for work. It is a well-known fact among development agency circles that Afghan women staff are targets and routinely put their lives on the line as a result of their work.

The Taliban used the "women's question" to enforce its own agenda. The imperialist occupation forces have also used the agenda of gender equality to ultimately pursue their own interests: the occupation of Afghanistan for strategic geo-political reasons. In the eyes of many people, the ministry of women is associated with the occupation. A meeting with the minister, referred to by the title "Her Excellency", who sat behind an enormous, glittering desk accompanied by an entourage of some half-a-dozen minions, was like an audience with royalty — clueless and out of touch. Meanwhile, life for a majority of the women and girls in Afghanistan is one of desperate suffering under extreme forms of oppression.

Gender equality can only be meaningful when the cause is championed by a politically independent movement of women. This is the hard-learned lesson of the international women's movement, the militant sections of which have campaigned for the autonomy and independence of the movement since its inception. The cause of gender equality that aligns itself with the imperialist occupation, whether clothed in development or some other pseudo-democratic rhetoric, is bound to harm the interests of the majority of women in Afghanistan, Iraq or elsewhere. And, as the situation in Afghanistan indicates, it's a failing strategy.

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Chile: The Lesson That Venezuela Learned?

Hugo Blanco was a principal organizer and leader of the Quechua peasant uprising in the Cuzco region of Peru in the early 1960s. He was captured by the military and sentenced to 25 years in El Fronton Island prison for his activities. While in prison, he wrote Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru (Pathfinder Press, 1972), which is must-reading for anyone who wishes to understand the struggle of peasants and indigenous people in Latin America for liberation.

An international campaign won him freedom in 1970, but he was sent into exile, first in Mexico and then in Chile. He later returned to Peru and played a key role in the rebuilding of the revolutionary left there.

*Originally published in *Rebelión* as *Chile: ¿La lección que Venezuela aprendió?* Translation by Cuba News, edited by Walter Lippmann*

By Hugo Blanco

While in exile, I was lucky to be part of the process of changes staged by the Chilean people up until Pinochet's coup d'état.

I can summarize my experience with the chess player's maxim: "Attacking is the best defense," a truth I painfully attested to in the case of Chile. As it often happens, these changes were soon challenged by the corporate sector with a number of attacks that the government failed to rebuff with a firm hand, taking a soft, conciliatory line on them instead of joining forces with the people against the saboteurs. Encouraged, the attackers reinforced their siege, whereas frustration and disappointment got the better of the ordinary citizens backing the process. Therefore, the time was ripe for the coup to succeed.

Overview

Having reached maturity in their struggle as well as in their conscience, the Chilean people became disillusioned with the Christian Democrat government and elected Unidad Popular's candidate Salvador Allende despite the smear campaign unleashed against him by the big owners.

Calmly and without taking any spectacular revolutionary measure, the government moved on and tried to implement the agrarian reform law enacted by its predecessors, decreed considerable price reductions for essential goods, and accorded the right to strike.

For their part, the poor were gaining ground:

The workers took control of industries where damaging actions like sabotage against production were committed, and prepared to defend themselves against right-wing paramilitary gangs tolerated by the police.

Organized by production sectors (in textile, metallurgical, shoe and other industries) like in any other country, they established another, more agile group, the "Industrial Cordons", geographically divided into production areas where workers from every branch united for self-

defense and combat and planned mobilizations that included blockades and occupation of factories.

Also the marginalized and peasants, who seized lands to demand a faster agrarian reform, took part in self-defense preparedness.

Shopkeepers responded to the price reductions with hoarding, giving rise to shortages and thus forcing people to buy their goods in the black market at very expensive prices. The people reacted by condemning and publicly exposing the hoarders.

As the great media unleashed the usual smear campaign the right made aggressive public demonstrations in full view of a dismissive police.

As the driving force behind the coup, the American empire had already revealed its criminal intentions before Allende's inauguration by ordering the murder of Army commander Schneider for refusing to mount the coup. A crime, needless to say, that has remained unpunished.

Instead of taking any action against the saboteurs that the people had unmasked and denounced, the government hogtied the popular advance on the grounds that they were being supported by the "constitutionalist military", who were worried about the peoples' actions. One of such "constitutionalist military" was Pinochet.

"Confiscated" factories

As mentioned above, the workers occupied factories where irregularities were discovered and for which a provisional manager was appointed by the government. Called "confiscated" factories, they implemented labor self-management to some extent. A tomato sauce factory was seized after the boss tried to have it closed down by neglecting to buy raw materials during the harvest time. Once confiscated, the workers decided to produce much-needed canned baby food.

Another factory where luxury furniture was manufactured was devoted to the production of affordable furniture. Clearly, when revolutionary awareness increases among the workers, solidarity replaces selfishness.

These were the factories attacked by fascist gangs that the workers decided to defend given the police's inactivity.

The end

The right kept undersupplying the economy while its media howled accusations against the government. Anti-government rallies and unfettered fascist violence were rampant while the regime prohibited self-defense, which of course encouraged the right-wingers and disheartened the people.

In June 1973 the Empire staged a "testing coup" to pinpoint where popular resistance was stronger. Once detected, those who took part in the action "surrendered" and the repressive forces proceeded to inflict cruel punishment on the sources of resistance thus detected (Cerrillos cordon, "Nueva Habana" village, the seamen who refused to take part in the coup, the mapuches, etc.), all under Allende's government and on account of his inaction.

In September, Pinochet's coup took place by extraordinarily violent means to make sure the courageous Chilean people could be defeated. And they killed Allende, who bravely refused to surrender and whose last speech had condemned the "treacherous military who until very recently swore their allegiance".

Perón's Argentina

I had already taken part in another similar event: Argentina in 1955, when the Yankee government mounted a coup against Perón. There was also a testing coup in June to find pockets of resistance, and then the real one in September, just like in Chile. There too the government put a curb on anti-coup activity and even punished those who opposed, with similar results: the right became bolder and the people lost heart, which paved the way for the September coup's success.

Guatemala

A year before, the exiled Peruvian left discussed the case of Guatemala (another imperial coup). Both the Communist Party and APRA (on the reformist left at the time, not the current empire's lackey) believed that Arbenz's government was going too fast and therefore making a mistake. I joined the party that stated further progress was needed to avoid disaster, a current and a conception that led me to participate in the Argentinean and Chilean processes.

Venezuela learned

All indications are that Venezuela learned the lesson. Yesterday in "El Comercio" daily an alarming article headlined "A civil war in the making" decried the "threat to the militia" of "armed groups parallel to the Army".

We know it will only be a "civil war" if imperialism and its servants dare to overthrow Venezuela's legitimate democratic government.

Naturally, what concerns that newspaper is pleasant and reassuring for us.

Another piece of good news coming from that country: far from pushing Chávez back, the shortage of foodstuffs caused by hoarding merchants makes the Venezuelan president move forward to warn that if they keep hoarding supplies the supermarkets will be nationalized and assigned to the people's "community councils".

Way to go.

It goes without saying these are different times, not those of a Chilean nation surrounded by gorilla governments in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay, but the epoch of a failed coup d'état in Venezuela and the victories of Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador.

Defeat can also teach a valuable lesson.

Socialist Voice #157, March 20, 2007

After the Elections: Assessing Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution

By Stuart Munckton

[This report was presented to the National Executive of Australia's Democratic Socialist Perspective on February 12, 2007. Its general line was adopted unanimously. Other documents from the DSP's discussion of the nature and prospects of the Bolivarian revolution have been posted on the DSP's website.]

The victory in the December elections

The victory of President Hugo Chavez in the December 3 presidential elections, on an explicit platform of creating socialism, was a major victory in the class struggle in Venezuela, and it opens the way to a new phase in the struggle to decisively deepen the revolution, breaking the political power of the objectively pro-capitalist state bureaucracy, and the economic power of the capitalist class. This victory cannot be understood either in purely electoral terms, or in a purely "Chavista versus opposition" framework.

The 2.5 million strong pro-Chavez election rally on November 27 in Caracas, a city of just five million, and the mobilization to vote and take over the streets with celebrations on the day were the key to victory. The November 27 demonstration was the largest revolutionary mobilization yet, and came just two days after, and in direct response to, the opposition electoral rally that numbered in the hundreds of thousands — itself most likely the largest counterrevolutionary mobilization yet. These mobilizations both broke the potential counterrevolutionary offensive and they showed that the revolutionary momentum remains on the up.

This growth in revolutionary momentum was registered in the raw voting figures themselves: 7.3 million votes for Chavez (63% of votes cast), the largest number of votes for a candidate in Venezuela's history and Chavez's highest percentage. It was over one million more than voted for Chavez in the August 2004 recall referendum and more than twice the number of votes cast for Chavez in the 2000 presidential elections. The base of support for the revolution is extending, as is the willingness to mobilize on the streets to defend it. This is in the context of the explicit radicalization of the revolution, with Chavez making it clear the elections were a referendum on the project of building socialism.

In the face of a strong campaign by the opposition that gathered some momentum, succeeding in remobilizing some of the counterrevolution's base of support in the middle class for the first time since their defeat in the recall referendum — and a campaign deliberately targeting the revolution's base of support amongst the poor by trying to play on its areas of weakness in solving the problems of the poor — the revolution came out decisively on top and stronger.

This victory also cuts into the pro-Chavez camp, which many revolutionaries insist has its fair share of "counterrevolutionaries in red berets". John Riddell in a January 11 *Socialist Voice* article (reprinted in *Green Left Weekly* January 18, 2007) commenting on Chavez's subsequent

announcement of the need for a united party for the revolution, said: “The prospect of a united, fighting party of the Venezuelan masses is indeed unsettling to the conservative careerists who occupy many high posts in the pro-Chavez political parties. But for working people, it could be the instrument they need to break the present deadlock in Venezuela’s class struggle and move decisively against capitalist rule. “The victory of the Bolivarian movement in the December 3 presidential elections has created the most favourable conditions yet for such an advance.” This is describing a situation of an incomplete struggle for power, and singling out the victory in the elections, and Chavez’s announcements since, as opening the way to overcome the “deadlock in Venezuela’s class struggle and move decisively against capitalist rule”. The class struggle, as Marx said, is a political struggle, and politics is the struggle for power. The state is made up of the institutions by which the power of a class is enforced on society. Breaking the deadlock means resolving the question of state power decisively in favour of the workers and peasants.

Post-election offensive

Chavez wasted no time in making clear his intention to use this momentum to unleash a struggle to dramatically deepen the revolution.

First, on December 20, Chavez gave a speech calling for a new, united socialist party. A key factor was the call for the party to be constructed from the ground up, by the most conscious militants in neighbourhoods across the country, rather than an amalgam of the existing parties. The aim of the party was explicitly stated as uniting the militants into a political weapon to advance the revolution, and further the struggle against corruption and bureaucracy. While the nature of this new party, and the road to its formation, is not yet decided and will be the product of much debate and struggle, the aim set out by Chavez is clearly to unite the disparate vanguard currently divided into a large number of different organizations, into a common organization to create a mass revolutionary party capable of carrying out the political and economic measures that have since been announced.

Then, on January 8, Chavez swore in his new cabinet, which contained significant changes. Jose Vincent Rangel has been replaced as vice president by Jorge Rodriguez, who is seen, if not necessarily further to the left than Rangel, then at least a figure more capable of pushing harder to force needed changes through. The generally popular Rangel, now in his 70s, is seen as a more conciliatory, fatherly figure.

The Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) was given an important ministry, the ministry for popular power and social development. This went to National Assembly deputy David Velasquez, a 28-year-old militant who was responsible for drafting the law on communal councils passed last April. This is the first time the PCV have had a position in the cabinet. They had previously held a position, according to PCV leader Carolus Wimmer, of not participating in the government in order to focus on grass roots work. Wimmer was quite critical of some of the ministers, especially those from the Homeland For All Party (PPT).

Also of note is that the new labour minister, Jose Ramon Rivera, is a self-described Trotskyist, and that after the reshuffle no ministerial positions were left in the hands of either the explicitly social democratic party Podemos, or the PPT. Ministers swore to struggle for socialism, and at

this and his inauguration two days later, Chavez explicitly referred to Marxism, referring to himself as a Trotskyist, saying he and Rangel were communists and telling the heads of the Catholic Church they should read Marx and Lenin, not just the Bible.

But the specific announcements were the most significant. The plan to nationalize previously privatized industry sent shock waves through corporate elite. These are not minor nationalizations. They include the largest telecommunications company, CANTV, six electricity companies, projects owned by foreign oil corporations mining heavy crude in the Orinoco belt, plus plans to spread the nationalization of oil to the entire hydrocarbon sector, including gas. CANTV is Venezuela's largest publicly traded company, and together with Electricidad de Caracas (EDC) they make up 50% of daily trading on the Caracas stock exchange. US corporations are the largest shareholders in CANTV and EDC, and the multinationals affected in the oil sector are Chevron, ExxonMobil, BP, Statoil and Total.

The Venezuelan government has wasted no time, having already come to an agreement to take control of CANTV, EDC and a smaller electricity company, also owned by US interests. Chavez has also given the oil companies in the Orinoco belt until May 1 to negotiate joint ventures that give PDVSA at least 60% holdings. The companies involved have all been fully compensated at market value, as is required under Venezuelan law, and so far this process has occurred relatively easily without much resistance. However, the purchases have not been voluntary. While some on the left criticize the Chavez government for compensating the capitalists, it is a tactical question and if the government can afford to offer compensation and in that way avoid a potentially destabilizing confrontation, it may well be the best course.

The imperialists seemed taken aback by the pace at which Chavez moved. One investment analyst was quoted as saying, while they had expected Chavez to make some radical announcements while swearing in his cabinet, they did not expect him to go so far as to name companies to be nationalized, and they were "completely shocked".

The Caracas stock exchange dropped by about one fifth in response. A February 6 Business Week online article wrote: "Nelson Ortiz, head of Venezuela's Caracas Stock Exchange, was optimistic before the Christmas holidays that the bolsa, the national stock exchange, was poised for another year of heady gains in 2007." The article points out that the exchange had more than doubled the previous year, fuelled by high oil prices and "heady" government spending. But the article claims, "the good times" won't continue, "if Chavez has his way".

The nationalization of CANTV and ADC also tighten government moves to prevent capital flight. This began with tight currency controls by the government over the purchasing of US dollars (which causes brigadistas a few headaches). The controls began in 2003, in order to stop capitalists taking their money out of Venezuela in order to avoid the repercussions of the economic crisis caused by their sabotage of the economy in the December 2002- January 2003 bosses lock-out that tried to force Chavez out of power. This has fuelled a black market that sees the bolivar trade at up to 80% higher for the US dollar than the official rate (b4000 as opposed to b2150). One major way to get around the controls on accessing US dollars was to purchase shares in CANTV or EDC, which are traded in the US, swap them for their US depository

receipts then sell those receipts overseas for US currency. The nationalizations close that avenue. Already, Business Week is telling “shocking” stories of business people taking US dollars bought on the black market out of the country in suitcases.

“There are a lot of locals in Venezuela trying to get dollars out of the country, fearing that Chavez is really going to step up his nationalization agenda,” says Christian Stracke, head of emerging markets research for CreditSights, a New York-based debt and equity research house.

Other important economic measures include taking control of the Central Bank of Venezuela to end its “autonomy”. The bank remains an institution controlled by the oligarchy and has resisted attempts to use its reserve to fund national development programs. Gaining government control over it would be a big blow to the economic power of the oligarchy. Chavez has also called for changes to taxation to make the rich pay a fuller share, and measures to enforce price controls of basic goods to combat inflation and speculation.

Facing the problems of inflation and shortages of some basic goods, blamed by the government on hoarding and speculation by the private sector trying to get around the strict government-enforced price controls (the government-run Mercal food distribution network has maintained a zero-inflation rate), the government has announced a combination of increased financial assistance to agricultural producers with measures to crack down on speculation and hoarding. In particular, Chavez has publicly threatened to nationalize capitalists caught violating the law on this issue.

Another indication of the government’s intentions to continue its trajectory of deepening the revolution was the presence of Rivera, as the new labour minister, on a 6000-strong march representing different sectors of workers and, in a positive sign, factions from different sides of the split in the pro-Chavez National Union of Workers (UNT), calling for the nationalization under co-management of ceramics factory Sanitarios Maracay. The company is being occupied and run under workers control by the majority of its workforce. The march also supported calls for nationalization of other companies, such as the steel company Sidor. Addressing the demonstration, Rivera expressed his support for these demands and said that Chavez was aware of his presence and supported the workers.

But equally important are the plans for what Chavez calls the “dismantling of the bourgeois state” via an explosion of popular power, with the communal councils the main institution. He has said these should be the building blocks for a new revolutionary state, even suggesting they could experiment with “socialist cities” where they were the only form of power. He called for the councils to both expand and also elect representatives on a regional level. There is a campaign to expand the number from 18,000 to 50,000. The communal councils are granted direct access to funds and control of social programs in their area. The general assembly of the community is the highest decision making body and elected members are subject to recall and are not paid. They are clearly being promoted as the main institutional form of popular power, as they unite under their umbrella all other existing committees, such as the elected urban land committees.

Exactly how this plays out in relation to existing institutions we will see.

Other plans to organize from the grass roots include promoting committees for social control committees to tackle corruption. Also, as part of the campaign against hoarding and speculation, the government has announced the formation of “supply committees” to organize the community to oversee production and distribution of basic goods. These committees would be operate as part of the communal councils.

Chavez has also said that the earnings of all public officials should not exceed US\$1400 per month, which would significantly reduce the salaries of top bureaucrats.

In an example of how deep the despotic inroads into the rights of capital can go with this push for popular power, an *El Universal* article on January 12 indicated plans by the government to allow for the creation of workers councils in workplaces, both private and public, across the economy to enable workers control over production. As well as this, a section of a companies profits would have by law be siphoned off for a “social destination” to benefit the immediate community in the area the companies operate in (i.e. a section of the profits would go directly to the communal councils).

The corporate media is up in arms about the enabling law granted to Chavez by the National Assembly on January 30 that gives Chavez to ability pass laws by decree in 11 set areas for a period of 18 months. However it isn't concern for democracy that is troubling them. It is that on the back of the election victory — a massive mobilization of working class power — the enabling law has been passed in order to as quickly as possible translate that victory into concrete steps forward that break the power of the pro-capitalist state bureaucracy and institutions such as the courts, prisons and police, as well as decisive areas of capitalist control over the economy,

A more detailed list of the 11 areas Chavez can pass legislation around can be found at <http://www2.minci.gob.ve/noticiaingles.asp?num=911>, however the main areas include:

- The transformation of state institutions;
- Increase in ability for popular participation in the affairs of the state;
- Measures to tackle corruption and set standards of efficiency amongst state officials; the development of a “sustainable economic model’ that includes strengthening the provision of health education and social security;
- Transformation of the existing financial and taxation systems in order to “regulate the activity of financial role of banks, to promote investment in the country’s endogenous development, to democratize credits and the free access to financing”.
- Citizen security via reforming the police, legal and penal system, attempting to end “impunity” crimes involving corruption and human rights abuses.
- Furthering the project of massively expanding public works, such as solving the housing crisis, constructing roads, railways, telecommunications and other areas.
- Nationalizing the entire hydrocarbons sector to ensure “national sovereignty” over all aspects relating to the energy industry.

Already, Chavez has used the enabling law to prepare a decree to enforce the price controls and tackle speculation. This includes the organization of working people into committees to oversee the law, and potentially nationalizations. Michael Lebowitz explained the class content of the enabling law in a February 1 article posted at MR Zine.com, and how it ties in to the ongoing struggle for power: “I had dinner last night with two friends ... who had spent a full day talking with people active in communal councils in two Caracas neighbourhoods (one extremely poor). And, they were telling me about the frustration and anger of so many with local and ministry officials who were holding back change — and about their identification with the impatience of Chavez, whom they trusted. Not surprisingly, this led us to a discussion of the Enabling Law ... No, they said, the people they saw weren’t worried about that *at all* — they *agree* with the need for speed.”

Transitional measures

The struggle to implement the economic measures creates the framework for the political struggle to extend the power of working people. The economic measures are transitional measures, in the sense spelled out in *The Transitional Program*, the document written by Leon Trotsky and adopted as the program of the Fourth International in 1938. They do not amount to socialism in and of themselves but they act as bridge in that direction by increasingly undermining capitalism while shifting the economy further towards one that solves the needs of working people.

The announced economic measures include: an attempt to implement workers control over production; a new tax system to place the burden more decisively on the rich; significant curbing of the right of capitalists to control the distribution of their profits; selective nationalizations over key strategic industries; deepening moves to stop capital flight and strengthening price controls.

These are measures that are part of carrying out the national democratic revolution by enabling Venezuela to increase its economic sovereignty and further the struggle to develop the nation to overcome the legacy of imperialist exploitation. However, it is undeniable that the road to socialism has been opened and these measures therefore go beyond the national democratic revolution and are steps towards a socialist state.

This occurs because, as an underdeveloped country dominated by imperialist capital, especially US, moves towards breaking the hold of imperialism and winning national sovereignty inevitably involve attacking key sectors of capitalism. This can be seen by the fact that, in order to ensure national sovereignty over strategic areas like telecommunications and electricity, and further strengthen Venezuelan sovereignty over oil reserves, the government has to take these interests out of the hands of multinationals based in the imperialist countries (mainly the US). The nationalizations therefore are both national democratic measures, and anti-capitalist measures that advance the struggle towards socialism.

Clearly these measures are not starting this process from scratch, but building on gains already made in this direction, most significantly the government gaining control over the state-run oil industry PDVSA in early 2003. This measure involved wresting control away from the pro-capitalist management who ran it in the interests of imperialism, going as far as preparing for its

privatization. This measure laid the basis for the range of pro-poor measures organized through the social missions and the many gains for working people made since. The new measures are aimed to extend state control over the “commanding heights” of the economy.

Ongoing struggle for power

The international bourgeoisie recognize the significance of the current phase, and just what is at stake. This explain the new propaganda offensive in the corporate media, that has begun to reach Australia.

There is an ongoing struggle for power in Venezuela, and control over a number of state institutions is still contested.

The task is to make further gains in constructing a new revolutionary state based directly on the workers and peasants and acting in their interests, and dismantling the old state structures that serve the capitalist class. As in the economic field, this is not starting from scratch. Especially crucial, without which the revolutionary government would have been overthrown, is the purging of the openly counterrevolutionary forces from the armed forces following the failed April 2002 coup, and the ongoing transformation of the armed forces into a weapon to defend the interests of the workers and peasants through the “civil-military alliance”.

While there are still problems with corruption inside the armed forces, and Chavez and sections of the armed forces have raised the alert about the existence of an underground counterrevolutionary section remaining, this armed power of the revolution is being complemented by the significant expansion of the army reserves and the territorial guards. As the measures of the revolution get increasingly radical, the loyalty of different sections of the armed forces will be increasingly tested, however the increasing integration of the military with the working people via the “civil-military alliance” and the moves to create a “people under arms” strengthen the revolutionary trajectory.

This however has not ended the question of state power. At the 22nd DSP congress in January 2006, the report delivered by comrade Kerryn Williams, “Imperialist crisis and the advancing Venezuelan revolution” (*The Activist* Vol 16 #1) adopted unanimously by congress delegates, identified the institutions not under control of the revolution as the “judiciary, the police force and a large section of the state bureaucracy” (*The Activist* Vol 16 #1, p7), pointing out there was still a battle for control over these institutions.

As well as the struggle within state institutions, there is also the creation of parallel structures to bypass the old state. Much of these have been organized around the social missions, and are increasingly organized through the communal councils. The plan is clearly to both wage a struggle against bureaucracy and corruption within the existing institutions and to significantly expand the parallel institutions with the aim of having them take on as much power as possible and potentially to replace the old institutions.

The inherited structures tasked with the actual administration of the state remain dominated by a corrupt, objectively counterrevolutionary bureaucracy that slow down or sabotage the implementation of revolutionary measures. Chavez explained in an interview that was published

in the September 26, 2006 *Green Left Weekly* that there was a “bureaucratic counterrevolution that is inside the state”. He said: “I spend my time with a whip because all around me is the enemy of an old and new bureaucracy that is resisting change.”

This is the meaning of Chavez’s comments since on the need to “dismantle the bourgeois state”, and create a “new, revolutionary state”. Chavez doesn’t deny that the struggle for a new state power has already made important gains. For instance in the interview he argued: “Today the Armed Forces is firmly on the side of the revolution. The military structure of Venezuela has been transformed to a great extent.”

These comments on the state are echoed by a wide range of Venezuelan revolutionaries, as was reflected in opinion offered by comrade Nelson Davila’s comments to the January 2006 DSP Socialist Summer School that the state in Venezuela is “counterrevolutionary” and “bourgeois”. This is also the view put forward by others such as William Izarra, who coordinates the Centres for Ideological Formation, and also by Carolus Wimmer, a leader of the PCV. This is not exactly how we have formulated the question, however the basis for this view is the hold by objectively counterrevolutionary forces over various state institutions. This view is expressed in Venezuela as: “the Fourth Republic is yet to die and the Fifth Republic is still being born”.

Overcoming this is not simply a question of legislation by the government or intention of the revolutionary leadership. The aim of constructing parallel institutions (via the missions) and in the economy (with the cooperatives and the co-managed enterprises) is both to get around the blockage of the old state bureaucracy, but most importantly to take the broader population through an experience and organize them in order to create the conditions to break the power of the old bureaucracy.

There is a strong passive culture amongst the poor that looks to above to solve problems. Also, some of the moves announced, such as plans for workers councils to introduce workers control over production — a move Trotsky explained in *The Transitional Program* introduces a form of “dual power” within a workplace between the workers council on the one hand and the capitalist owner on the other — would require a significant step forward in organizing the working class to actually implement. While there is plenty of evidence there is growing energy and enthusiasm among the working class, the majority of the workforce are still largely unorganized, and the organized workers are suffering a crisis of leadership with the split in the UNT.

It is not possible to grasp the significance of the revolutionary government’s announcements and actions post the elections unless you can see that it is about carrying out an ongoing struggle for state power. The partial degree by which power has been won by workers and peasants has conditioned the partial nature of the implementation of the government’s program so far.

Our position

What is our position? We have used the position, first adopted at the DSP National Committee meeting in November 2004, of an embryonic workers and peasants state. Key to this is the formation of a workers and peasants government through the struggles around the coup and the lock-out. Also, the armed forces, through the defeat of the coup, were broken from the capitalist class and are being used as a tool of the revolution.

However, we didn't argue that this finished the question. The report explicitly stated that the struggle for power, which is the struggle for dictatorship of one class, or alliance of classes, over another — exercised through state institutions — was ongoing. It stated “resolving [the struggle for power] is the decisive question facing the revolution”. The revolutionaries had “yet to decisively resolve what Marx referred to as the ‘battle of democracy’, they have yet to raise the working class to the position of the ruling class”. It argued that “Venezuela is neither a consolidated capitalist or workers’ state but is in a process of transition from one to the other” (TA Vol 14, #5, p7)

The report made the argument that “any assessment we make about where [the transition] is up to is a provisional assessment subject to confirmation by reality precisely because everything is in flux and we are trying to understand a complicated process from a great distance”.

In the *Program of the Democratic Socialist Party* in the section “Democracy and the transition to socialism”, (page 122), point three states: “The dismantling of the capitalist state, in the first place its repressive apparatus (military forces, police, judicial and penal system) is a necessary prerequisite for the conquest of political power by the working class.”

As we assessed at our last congress, this is still playing out in Venezuela. The police are extremely problematic, corrupt and violent and, most noticeably in the countryside, often in league with powerful interests attempting to stop the revolution. Attempts at reform have so far not made much ground, although there is a new attempt underway. There are sporadic examples where the working people have been able to drive police back, such as sections of Barrio January 23 that are policed by the community, but this is an exception.

The courts remain a big problem. They have failed to hold accountable those responsible for violence against peasant activists and corruption. The recent decision to drop the case against the murderers of state prosecutor Danilo Anderson in 2004, carried out by counterrevolutionary terrorists to stop his pursuing those behind the coup, and the dropping of the case against the opposition mayor who led the assault on the Cuban embassy during the coup are examples of the problems. Also, the decision by the Supreme Court last year to throw out legislation, against the opposition of the National Assembly and to the anger of the women’s movement, that allowed perpetrators of domestic violence to be held for 72 hours by police, is another example of the problem.

Conditions in the prisons by a number of accounts remain atrocious, and human rights abuses a serious problem, despite attempts by the government at reform aiming to “humanize” the system. This has been raised as a likely reason why the minister for justice, Jesse Chacon, was replaced in the reshuffle.

It is no accident that it is these three areas that Greg Barns highlights in his Hobart *Mercury* article (January 22, 2007) attacking the Chavez government. This shows the importance of understanding the limitations of the power the revolution has won so far. If we downplay the ongoing struggle for state power, then we undermine our ability to defend the revolution. In replying to Barns, a starting point is the limits of the government’s power — the extent to which there is *not* a dictatorship of the workers and peasants (obviously we would not explain it those

terms), and this is the cause of the problem. In other words, there is the need to be able to explain in a popular way the need to go beyond an “embryonic workers and peasants state”, to a decisively established state power, the dictatorship of workers and its allies such as the peasantry.

A workers and farmers government

An important formulation from the Marxist tradition, for which there are a series of concrete historical examples of how this plays out, is that of the workers’ and farmers’ government. This was formulated by the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922, as a slogan that calls for the formation of a government “independent of the bourgeoisie” as a transitional formation on the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialist state. The tasks of such a government would be to move as quickly as possible to dismantle the capitalist state and transfer power to a new workers state. “Such a government falls short of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but is still an important starting point for winning this dictatorship,” the Comintern theses argue. The exact way such a struggle played out, and the exact pace at which this process of transformation would take, can only be determined by concrete struggle.

One example of this process was the Cuban Revolution. In our resolution published in 1985 entitled *The Cuban Revolution and its Extension*, we argued that there was a transitional period in the Cuban Revolution between the formation of a government independent of the bourgeoisie, and the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We argued there were three key points in this process. The overthrow of Batista created a situation of dual power, in this case between a government dominated by representatives of the bourgeoisie, but the armed power lay with the revolutionary army of the July 26 movement. The struggle that developed over the implementation of the agrarian reform in July 1959 created a workers’ and farmers’ government, described as a transitional form of state power based on an alliance of the proletariat and peasants. With the widespread expropriations in October 1960, the socialist state — the full dictatorship of the proletariat — was created.

Not all examples of a workers and farmers government have led to the successful formation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Algeria, the workers and farmers government of Ben Bella from 1962-65 was defeated by a coup by one section of its leadership, based on the armed forces that had been created out of the struggle against French colonialism. Here, the revolution stalled as the tasks of transforming the armed forces; confronting the pro-capitalist state bureaucracy; deepening the organization of the working class; and crucially of organizing the vanguard into a political party to lead those struggles were abandoned by the Ben Bella leadership, opening the way to defeat.

This was the basic conclusion of the 1969 resolution on Algeria adopted by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International (reprinted in the 1974 US SWP’s pamphlet *The Workers and Farmers Government*, as part of its “Educational for Socialists” series). The resolution also notes one point that is at least partly analogous with Venezuela — as a result of the weakness of the capitalist class, “The immediate source of counterrevolutionary initiative was the state bureaucracy”.

However, in Venezuela it is clear that the Chavez leadership is attempting to push forward on the areas that the Ben Bella leadership abandoned, and the trajectory is clearly towards the dictatorship of the proletariat. Whether it remains on this trajectory and its successful will of course be the product of struggle.

Our resolution on the Cuban Revolution contains another example — Grenada, where Maurice Bishop headed a workers and farmers government that lasted four and a half years, before being destroyed by a counterrevolutionary coup (couched in ultra-left rhetoric) by one section of the government against the revolutionary current headed by Bishop.

It should be noted that all these examples of workers and farmers governments rested on some form of armed power. A workers and farmers government that didn't could be destroyed immediately by armed counterrevolution. However, simply having a workers and farmers government, resting on armed force that backs the revolution, is not the same as having the dictatorship of the proletariat, but is a transitional form that opens the road towards it .

The DSP program

What does our program say on the question? In the section “Democracy and the struggle for workers power” (*Program of the DSP*, p. 124), it lists a series of points on the struggle to overthrow the bourgeois state, and create a workers state to implement socialism. The points include:

“7. The first qualitative step in establishing the democratic power of the working class is the revolutionary replacement of the capitalist government by a working people's government based on the soviets and other organs of mass revolutionary struggle.

“8. Such a government stands at the head of a turbulent, transitional process, during which the capitalist class retains significant advantages. Unless it acts decisively to consolidate the organs of revolutionary mass struggle as the new institutions of state power, that is, to replace the weakened capitalist state with a workers' state, and to organize the workers to assert control over the capitalists, the revolutionary foundations of the working people's government will gradually be undermined. The capitalists will use their economic power to unleash economic chaos, leading increasing sections of the working people to become demoralized, inactive, and confused. The erosion of the masses' confidence in the revolutionary leadership will enable the capitalists to reassert their political power — to oust the working people's government, re-establish a capitalist government, rebuild the capitalist state machine, and dismantle the democratic gains of the revolutionary upsurge.

“9. The consolidation of the workers' state and mechanisms for workers' control over the capitalists enables the working class to prepare itself to begin 'wresting by degrees' productive property from the capitalist class, to establish a state monopoly of foreign trade and to introduce a planned economy.”

Obviously the struggle has played out differently than how it is formulated here, but no revolution has ever unfolded according to the dictates of a written program. I think that, understood broadly,

Venezuela remains within point 8. The struggle is that of a workers and farmers government that is still attempting, not just to consolidate, but in some cases still to create, the new institutions of state power.

For instance, the struggle for workers to assert control over the capitalists, identified both in our program and by the Comintern in 1922 as a key task of a workers and farmers government, is still largely a task to be fulfilled. One sign of the scale of the struggle to advance facing the revolution is the difficulty in tasking the struggle for co-management, around which there was enormous enthusiasm for taking forward in 2005, with one million workers marching under the slogan of “without co-management there is no revolution” on May Day. However, the actual experience of co-management, which is not necessarily the same as workers’ control but is one form that the struggle for workers’ control has taken in Venezuela, has remained limited to small sections of the economy. Now, the intention of the government is to find a new way to push forward the struggle for working people to exercise control over the economy, with the promotion of workers councils.

Resolving the unfinished struggle

In the period since August 2004, with the momentum gained via the defeat of the recall referendum, a new phase in the revolution has opened up — the struggle for a “revolution within the revolution”. This has aimed to extend the organization of working people via parallel structures in order to lay the groundwork for increasingly radical measures.

Significant gains have been made in this time, in terms of confronting needs of the poor majority. This underpins the growing confidence and radicalization, increasing support for the revolution. We have seen poverty drop from 49% of households at the start on 1998, to 33% at the start of 2006, according to government figures. The number of households in extreme poverty has dropped from 17% to 10% in the same period. Government social spending has increased by nearly ten times. The number of social missions grows constantly, tackling an increase number of social problems (with varying degrees of success) and at the same time increasing the organization of the poor outside the old state structures.

The expansion of education is especially important. The Chavez government aims to create 50 new universities, with half that number already being created. Central to this is not just the extension of access to education to those who have never had it before, but the attempt to transform the nature of education to one that serves the revolution. This means developing technologies and skills in sectors that will enable the country to develop away from dependency on oil. It also means developing new, socialist values. As well as democratizing the structures of education, the aim is to integrate education into the life of the poor communities, so that there is not a separation between study and all other facets of the lives of working people. In this way the education system can create educated people willing and able to act in the interests of the revolution, and in this way increasingly replace the old bureaucracy.

The gains associated with the last period have also seen the strengthening of the working class, despite problems of organization. Part of the transition from a workers and farmers government to a dictatorship of the proletariat in Venezuela involves the rebuilding not just of the workers

movement, but to a certain extent of the working class into a social force capable of governing society, following the devastation caused by neoliberalism. Over 50% of the working class has been in the informal sector.

However, this is being reduced and the latest government figures put it at 57% of workers in the formal sector according to latest government figures. This is achieved partly through a drop in unemployment through economic growth fuelled by public spending as well as high oil prices to the lowest point in Chavez's government —8.4 %. At one point after the lock-out it had reached 20%.

Most important is the expansion of cooperatives and the state sector. Over 100,000 new cooperatives, based on the urban and rural poor, taking people out of the informal sector and into productive work. This amounts to an increasing proletarianization of the Venezuelan poor. This is important because the atomized urban poor, which was the main social base the revolution began with, is not a social force capable by itself of constructing socialism.

This process, combined with the expansion of education and incorporation of working people into institutions that enable them to begin exercising real control, is important to giving the working class the experiences they need to increasingly take over running society.

These gains made so far are absolutely essential to the advance of the revolution. However, they don't in and of themselves resolve decisive questions. The redistribution of wealth, the expansion of the social missions, the creation of parallel structures, none of these transform social relations. They do, however, help prepare the working class for such a transformation. The missions do not amount to a social revolution, but neither can you imagine a social revolution in Venezuela without the missions.

The struggle now is to take the impressive groundwork that the missions have achieved in raising the poor out of degradation and laying the foundations for a new system, and use these gains to drive forward to break the back of capitalism in Venezuela.

Overcoming the obstacles

However, the revolution has increasingly come up against a series of obstacles in its struggle to advance, obstacles that have led Chavez to call for a "revolution within the revolution". The three main obstacles are:

1. The old state bureaucracy
2. The hold of bureaucracy, opportunism and corruption amongst main Chavista parties, i.e.: same methods and often tied into the state bureaucracy |
3. The weakness of popular organization, especially the workers movement

The third point is the crucial one to overcome because it is the key to overcoming the first two. In any area where the working people are not strong enough to break the hold of the bureaucrats, and replace their power with their own, the bureaucrats will hold on to positions of power and from this position sabotage the revolution.

There have been over the last period increasing frustrations with bureaucracy, with the most obvious being in the areas of land reform, and also housing (where the government has fallen a long way short of its goals and the needs of the poor). The distance between a number of “pro-Chavez” officials and the popular movements, with the latter accusing a number of the former of being “counterrevolutionaries in red berets”, exacerbates this problem.

One of the centres of the struggle has been over how to select candidates for elected positions. The main pro-Chavez parties have done this behind closed doors and many candidates are not known or trusted by the ranks. This is despite Chavez, after the recall referendum, insisting that this practice must stop and that there must be popular elections for candidates (as is required by the constitution). He also called for the consolidation and extension of the successful grass roots “units of electoral battles” (UBEs). However, the opportunists inside the main Chavista parties in both cases prevented this from occurring.

Chavez has re-raised both these problems after the presidential election victory, this time in the framework of the proposed United Socialist Party of Venezuela. This party, says Chavez, must have popular elections for all positions and candidates. And the role he has assigned to it is similar to the role played by the UBEs in uniting the vanguard to organize the working people. With this fresh victory and the further radicalization of the working people, perhaps the correlation of forces are such that the opportunists will be unable to block such an advance as they have done previously. The struggle will determine this.

George Ciccariello-Maher, in a January 9 opinion piece entitled “Beyond Chavistas and anti-Chavistas”, makes some useful observations about how, with the repeated defeats of the openly counterrevolutionary opposition, some of the most important fights are now developing within the Chavista camp. He says: “A myth has long existed in commentary on Venezuela, which goes something like the following: when discussing the Venezuelan revolution, the relevant actors can be expressed through the binary ‘Chavista/Anti-Chavistas’ ... we cannot even begin to grasp the recent call for a unitary socialist party and the dissolution of the MVR within the framework of Chavistas versus the opposition.”

He argues that “the danger of such a framework is above all political: by lumping the entire ‘Chavista’ voting bloc into one homogeneous mass, we run the risk of missing precisely what is most radical about the process.

“While the internal dynamics of the revolutionary movement are variegated and shifting, with multiple axes, criteria, and alliances, for analytical and political purposes, it is useful to introduce the idea that there are *two Chavismos*. These are, on the one hand, the middle-of-the-road, social democratic Chavistas, who occupy some of the highest posts in the government, and who are largely represented by the centrist current of the MVR and PODEMOS... an admittedly social democratic electoral alliance.”

This intersects with the struggle against the corrupt, pro-capitalist state bureaucracy that is holding the revolution back, as Ciccariello-Mayer points out: “Perhaps more salient than their centrist orientation, this sector is ideologically the least hostile to and hence most susceptible to bureaucratization and corruption.”

Luis Tascon, an MVR National Assembly deputy, in an interview published in *Green Left Weekly* on August 30, 2006, argued: “In the discussion of ‘socialism of the 21st century’, there will undoubtedly be a confrontation between different Chavistas. I am sure there will be a conflict of particular interests between the left and the right [within the process]. But it will not be the traditional right [who are in opposition to Chavez], but a Chavista right-wing.”

You have a situation whereby there is on the one hand a strong state bureaucracy, which finds a certain base of support within the Chavista camp. On the other hand, you have an explosion of mass organizing as increasingly broad layers of working people get drawn into political action and are increasingly radicalized. But this is dispersed, not cohered and a lack of leadership makes it hard for this enthusiasm and determination to advance.

This makes it important to understand what Michael Lebowitz explained in an interview published in the November 20 *Socialist Voice*: “The problem of the Venezuelan revolution is from within. It’s whether it will be deformed by people around Chavez.” The struggle for power, to further advance towards the dictatorship of the proletariat, has occurred in a situation where the capitalist class has found itself too weak to govern — it has proven completely unable to overthrow the workers and farmers government, and has no serious potential to do so in the immediate future.

The capitalist class in Venezuela is socially weak, devastated by neoliberalism that subordinated it further to the interests of imperialism and put it further in hock to those interests. One result is that its political representatives stand completely discredited, with the brutal suppression of the Caracazo, an uprising against neoliberal policies in 1989, a fatal blow. This opened the way for Chavez to be elected president in 1998. Since then, with the capitalist-led rebellion against relatively moderate pro-poor reforms, with the coup and the lock-out, they have done such damage to themselves that it can not be overcome in the short term.

In the presidential elections, the Chavistas plastered the country with posters featuring opposition candidate Manuel Rosales shaking hands with coup leader Pedro Carmona during the latter’s brief reign. Rosales’s claim he was “confused” at the time was unlikely to have convinced too many people.

However, the working class and its allies have not been strong enough to enforce their will decisively on society either. Hence you have a drawn out struggle for power, where the capitalist can’t govern but the workers and farmers government is facing a difficult struggle to advance towards the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In this situation, the role of the state bureaucracy, already powerful in Venezuela due to the traditional ties between the state and the oil industry that have made the state a key source of accumulating wealth, has taken on greater weight.

This inherently unstable situation has been able to maintain itself for a period as a result of the oil wealth and the economic growth fuelled by that wealth. For instance, in 2005, oil profits tripled from the previous year, even after nearly \$7 billion was taken out directly for social programs. This has given the workers and peasants government the space to carry out significant social projects to the benefit of working people via redistributing the oil wealth, and fund the

creation of parallel structures, along side the old ministries and other state institutions that hold the process back. Also, the oil wealth allows for an expansion of the social economy via funding the cooperatives, without significantly encroaching on the capitalist sector.

Chavez explained in the interview from the September 27 2006 *Green left Weekly* article: “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.” This contradiction cannot continue forever, and the pressures are growing acute in various sectors. Through his post-election announcements, Chavez has indicated that the new phase of the struggle is about ending the contradictions in favour of the revolution.

Some concrete examples of the way the limitations of the revolution’s power frustrate the process include the difficult and increasingly bloody struggle in the countryside to advance the land reform. Here, over 150 peasant activists have been murdered by death squads tied to the large land owners, but almost no-one has been jailed. Colombian paramilitaries are increasingly entering Venezuela from the border, in many cases assisted by corruption within the armed forces, and this has contributed to a bloody terror that, Luis Tascon has claimed, has killed as many as 1700 people in one state alone.

On the other hand, the state bureaucracy has slowed down the land reform considerably, with many peasants complaining about the difficulty in getting land titles, as well promised credit and other forms of assistance. Often the money assigned disappears via corruption before it reaches the peasants. In September last year, peasants protested the role of the state corporation *CorpoAndes* in the Andean region in refusing to implement the agreements signed with peasants that would implement the economic program pushed by the government, instead continuing to play its traditional role in assisting corporate interests. When they occupied the building, police arrested the peasants.

The problem is the difference between the measures pushed for by the government on the one hand, and the organized peasants on the other, and the actual measures carried out by the state institutions. In an interview by Edward Ellis posted on *Venezuelanlaysia.com* on January 19, Miguel Basabe, who is the director of education and public relations at the agricultural cooperative of Bevere in Maracaibo, described the situation like this: “the government has a great will, politically. But we have a big problem which is bureaucracy... The same bureaucracy impedes the efficient action of the security corps.” Asked about the role of the armed forces, he said “here has been a change at the level of the army. After the coup d’état in April 2002 there has been a process of cleaning the armed forces and we are already have an armed forces more in line with the people... Today we can say that we can count on the armed forces.”

Another example is the case in September last year involving the small-scale gold miners in the state of Bolivar. This mining is environmentally destructive, however it continues because the promised assistance from the government for those involved to be retrained and form cooperatives in other areas has never materialized. The program of the government has completely failed to be implemented. This led to a situation that when corrupt soldiers murdered six impoverished miners in order to steal their gold, it was the spark for violent riots that saw the mayor's office burned down. This is the direct result of the limitation of the government's power, the fact that the corrupt bureaucracy frustrates the implementation of its stated policies, with the small miners being screwed and their anger boiling over.

Coal mining on indigenous land against the opposition of the indigenous people is another. Again, the key culprit is a state institution, working with multinationals. Indigenous people protest, while expressing support for Chavez. This environmentally destructive exploitation of indigenous lands is in violation of the Bolivarian constitution. It reflects the fact that there is still a struggle to be able to implement parts of the constitution, with imperialist interests, backed by the state bureaucracy, still holding the power to prevent its implementation. It is possible to see concretely, that if real power was able to be exercised through the new institutions of popular power, this could be ended. Communal councils of the indigenous people in the affected areas would not vote to allow it.

The defeat of co-management by some sections of the state bureaucracy in state industry is another example. In the electricity sector, the corrupt, pro-capitalist state bureaucracy were able to defeat co-management despite a campaign waged by the unions who had the support of Chavez and the labour minister.

Conclusion

We should reaffirm the concept of an embryonic workers and peasants state. The dictatorship of the working class and its allies is still being created. This is a transitional and unstable period. The use of "embryonic" is essential to understand the current stage of the struggle. It defines the existence of a workers and farmers government, resting on an armed forces that are no longer a tool in the hands of capital but undergoing a process of transformation into a consolidated tool of the workers and peasants. Such a government has to move forward to the decisive creation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and a socialist state.

Understanding the contradictions in the current situation is important because it is through resolving these contradictions in favour of the working class that the struggle for power will be decisively resolved.

However, between the current stage and the dictatorship of the proletariat there are significant blocks that can only be overcome through revolutionary struggle. Most significant is the role of the state bureaucracy, in conjunction with the economic power still in the hands of the capitalist class

The key to resolving this struggle is the difficult one of increasing the organization and consciousness of the working class. Chavez has from the beginning sought to base the Bolivarian

revolution as much as possible on the greatest mobilization of the working people, and to constantly radicalize the process.

However, this is an ongoing battle. Chavez has announced a new phase in the struggle via the creation of a new united socialist party to unite the revolutionary militants from the ground up. If successful this would provide a much needed political tool to carry the struggle out. The new institutions of popular power have the potential to be “schools of democracy” for the working people, that allow them to develop the ability to govern through the practice of increasingly exercising power. Through this power, the economic power in the hands of the capitalist class can be broken.

It is an extremely exciting period for revolutionaries worldwide. The Bolivarian revolution stands on the cusp of creating the first socialist state in South America, and the first socialist state since the collapse of the Soviet bloc and in the 21st century.

Socialist Voice #158, March 24, 2007

Is Cuba ‘State-Capitalist’?

by **Larry Seigle**

[This is an excerpt from a report given to an expanded meeting of the Political Committee of the US Socialist Workers Party on August 14, 1978. The Revolutionary Marxist Committee, a group which viewed the Soviet Union and Cuba as “state capitalist,” had recently joined the SWP.]

The comrades in the SWP who hold that Cuba is a state-capitalist country believe the Soviet Union is state-capitalist also. These comrades start from the political conclusion that there is nothing left of the October revolution to defend against imperialism today. From the standpoint of the world working class and its tasks, they see no qualitative difference between the Soviet Union and the United States. They believe the Soviet section of the Fourth International should be for the defeat of the Soviet Union in a war with imperialism. This is the political difference they have with Trotskyism.

It is a fundamental difference, with many political ramifications.

A corollary of this political stance is a basic disagreement with the position of the Trotskyist movement on the characteristics of a workers state. These comrades hold that a workers state exists if, and only if, the working class directly exercises political rule through democratic proletarian forms. If the working class does not exercise direct rule through its own democratic forms, it is not a workers state. They do not agree that the class character of a state is determined by the property relations it defends.

To back up this view they quote extensively from Marx and Lenin’s predictions about what the proletarian dictatorship would look like, and what they urged the workers to fight for. They correctly point out that proletarian democracy is necessary to achieve the transition to socialism. Then they show that the Soviet Union deviates from that norm of a workers state — that the Stalinist bureaucracy has usurped political power, that the proletariat is disenfranchised and oppressed.

They argue that the Soviet Union ceased being a workers state around 1939, not because of any change in the relations of production or in property relations — which remained the same — but because of changes in the party and government. The purges of the old Bolsheviks, they say, severed the last living links to the October revolution. In other words, the class character of the state is determined not by the property relations that the state defends but by whether the political forms correspond to the programmatic norms laid out by Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky and defended by our movement.

We think these comrades use incorrect criteria for defining a workers state. Their error flows from the wrong political position of abandoning the fight to defend the economic conquests of the Bolshevik revolution before the decisive battle on that front has been fought.

But the position these comrades hold on the Soviet Union does not directly prove anything about the class character of Cuba. You can hold that the Soviet Union is state capitalist, but it doesn’t

automatically follow that Cuba is state capitalist. The Cuban revolution has its own dynamic — its own course of development that is quite different from the course of events in the Soviet Union. So we have to look at Cuba, not at the Soviet Union, to decide the class nature of the Cuban state and our political stance toward it. It's one thing to say that the Soviet Union, which had a proletarian revolution in 1917, degenerated to the point where the workers state was overturned. That's wrong. That's not a small mistake — it's a very big mistake but it's not a new one.

It's quite another thing to say that there was never a workers state in Cuba, that there was never a social revolution in Cuba. Because if you can't recognize the socialist revolution in Cuba, it's doubtful that you could recognize one anywhere. And a leadership that can't recognize a revolution, can't lead one.

Healy's Sectarian Line

The original proponent in our movement of the point of view that Cuba remained capitalist was Gerry Healy, then a leader of the British section of the [Fourth] International, who refused to recognize the socialist nature of the revolution. He didn't think it was state capitalist — just capitalist. In his view, not much had changed in Cuba. He stood outside of and in opposition to the revolutionary process, and therefore avoided the necessity of throwing himself into the struggle to defend it against imperialist threats and attacks and to advance that revolution.

In the case of Healy, this sectarian stance toward the Cuban revolution went hand in hand with sectarian opposition to the process of reunification of the divided Fourth International.

Agreement on Cuba was a key part of the political convergence that was taking place in the early 1960s, and gave a big impetus to the process of reunification. Healy's main interest was in using the Cuban revolution — which he didn't give a damn about — as a factional issue to block reunification.

The National Committee of Healy's Socialist Labour League wrote: "Does the dictatorship of the proletariat exist in Cuba? We reply categorically NO! The absence of a party squarely based on the workers and poor peasants makes it impossible to set up and maintain such a dictatorship. But what is even more significant is the absence of what the SWP euphemistically terms 'the institutions of proletarian democracy' or what we prefer to call soviets or organs of workers' power."

According to Healy, and the comrades in the SWP who agreed with him, Cuba remained capitalist. Why? Because the Cuban revolution was not under the leadership of a recognized section or duly chartered sympathizing group of the Fourth International: "Cuba can and will be defined as a workers' state only when a revolutionary party based on the program of the Fourth International has successfully overthrown the capitalist state ..." That was the Healyite position.

The comrades who today believe that Cuba is state-capitalist don't share Healy's political position. But they make a similar error by refusing to recognize the importance of property relations in defining the class character of a state.

Contradictions of 'State Capitalism'

The political problem with the state-capitalist view of Cuba is elementary. If all the gains and conquests of the Cuban revolution are possible under *capitalism*, then two things follow. First, we must say that this opens up the perspective of a whole new era of progress for humanity under capitalism, at least in the semi-colonial world; and second, we must defend that kind of capitalism as a better kind of capitalism than that which existed under Batista or the capitalism that exists in the other Latin American countries today.

In other words, all of Marxism goes out the window.

Let's look at the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in the colonial world, which we know can only be carried out, in the imperialist epoch, under the leadership of the proletariat.

We can start with the land reform. There was a sweeping, radical land reform in Cuba. Unlike Stalin's bureaucratic and brutal forced collectivization, it had the overwhelming support of the peasants, rural poor, and agricultural workers. The result of this key advance was the consolidation of the political alliance between the Cuban workers and the Cuban peasants, an alliance that remains solid today.

Do we politically support this land reform? Should we have advocated it at the time? If not, how would our program have differed from the one actually carried out?

What about national independence? Cuba was a colony of the United States in everything but name. American capital owned great parts of Cuba's wealth. Batista was a Wall Street puppet. Havana was a cesspool of American gamblers, racketeers, drug dealers, and pimps.

That has been totally changed. Not a single piece of imperialist-owned property, machinery, land, or anything exists in Cuba today with the exception of Guantanamo Bay base held by American imperialism through military force. The degradation and exploitation by American imperialism has ended. Cuba is the only country in all of Latin America that is truly independent from US imperialism. Are we for this or against it? Was kicking out the imperialists a good thing? Could it have been done better or more thoroughly by a workers state than a "state-capitalist state"?

The Cubans carried out this task pretty well. And not because the Yankees willingly let go. Wall street fought hard. US imperialism mobilized its economic and political power against Cuba. When that failed, it organized an invasion. And the invasion was beaten back! At the Bay of Pigs.

Then in 1962, the imperialists began preparing for a second, more determined invasion. The Cubans knew it was coming. To head this off, Castro got nuclear arms from the Soviet Union and used them to call Kennedy's hand. This was a bold move, but the alternative was to allow an invasion to take place and go down fighting against vastly superior military forces. And it worked; the invasion plans were shelved, and the United States has had to keep them on the shelf ever since.

Castro's decision to obtain nuclear weapons thus prevented the Yankee military occupation of Cuba, a step that would have bathed Cuba in blood and rolled back the first socialist revolution in the Americas. Had the imperialists succeeded, it would have significantly shifted the world

relationship of class forces against the workers and peasants. And the negative consequences for the world revolution would have been felt everywhere — in Vietnam, in Africa, and throughout Latin America.

Were we for Cuba and against the Yankee aggression? Obviously we have no differences on this. We were for Cuba. But how could we explain that *capitalist* Cuba stood off US imperialism?

Moreover, the Cuban revolution has continued to defy Uncle Sam internationally. For 20 years it has refused to bow down to the demands of Yankee imperialism. And it has done more. In Angola — not in Latin America, but in *Africa* — Cuban troops played a decisive role in the defeat of the invading South African imperialist army. How could you explain *capitalist* Cuba sending troops to Africa to stand up to imperialism?

In another area of bourgeois-democratic tasks, along with land reform and national independence, we should add that the revolution made gigantic strides in ending the oppression of Blacks in Cuba, a key aspect of the national question. The job is not finished, but the Cubans have made greater progress on this front than any other country in the world.

The Cuban revolution put an end to Batista's torture chambers, his firing squads, his secret police. It turned his barracks into schools.

The political problems of the state-capitalist position don't stop with the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, because the Cuban revolution didn't stop with the bourgeois-democratic tasks. It has gone on to eliminate unemployment — eliminate the industrial reserve army, one of the preconditions for capitalism. It has advanced the standing of women in society; qualitatively raised the standards of education, of health care, of housing, of culture. Every measure of the standard of living and the quality of life of the Cuban masses has been qualitatively improved.

This is absolutely indisputable. Obviously we are in favour of these gains and defend them.

But where does that leave us?

If we say that Cuba is capitalist, then we have to say that something new has appeared in the world. A new kind of progressive capitalist class has developed. A variety of capitalism has emerged that is superior, at least from the standpoint of the Cuban workers and peasants, and African workers and peasants, to any capitalism they have ever known.

Are we for it or against it? The Cuban people are for it, no doubt about that. They know there is something qualitatively better about Cuban society today than pre-1959.

But if Cuban *capitalism* can carry through a radical land reform, can achieve national independence from American imperialism, can advance the level of human dignity — if Cuban *capitalism* can do all that, then what happens to the theory of the permanent revolution?

The laws of the class struggle in the imperialist epoch preclude the possibility that the national bourgeoisie can solve the unfinished tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Only a workers and peasants alliance against imperialism, led by the proletariat, going over to measures that are socialist in principle and carried out against the national bourgeoisie, can solve the postponed democratic tasks.

But if Cuba is capitalist shouldn't we tell the people of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, who are striving to follow the Cuban example, that the Fourth International says: "Struggle for socialism, but if you can't get that, at least struggle for state capitalism, because it too can solve most of the fundamental problems that you face"? Wouldn't we have to say that?

We would have to abandon Marxism, abandon a scientific analysis of class society and say that capitalism in our time can promise a better life, that capitalism can enter upon a new era of human development and economic and social progress, including in the super-exploited, dependent countries.

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Review: *Independent Politics: The Green Party Strategy Debate*

Howie Hawkins, editor. *Independent Politics: The Green Party Strategy Debate*, Haymarket Books. Chicago, 2006. 328 pages

Reviewed by Derrick O’Keefe

Did the last presidential election campaign in the United States represent the nadir of Ralph Nader’s long and remarkable public life? Or, was it instead the rottenness of the two-corporate party system that hit new lows in the run-up to the 2004 election?

The ugly spectacle of Campaign 2004 is the topic of Howie Hawkins’s *Independent Politics: The Green Party Strategy Debate*. Hawkins, a long-time labour and social justice activist, comes down strongly in favour of the Nader-Peter Camejo campaign, which ran in spite of an official “safe states” strategy adopted by the Green Party under nominal presidential candidate David Cobb.

Independent Politics includes contributions from leaders of both sides of this acrimonious debate, one that dominated discussion amongst much of the Left in the United States throughout 2004. The likes of Norman Solomon, Cobb and renown peace activist Medea Benjamin defend the “Anybody But Bush” strategy, only advocating Green votes in safe states, while Camejo, Nader, Jeffrey St. Clair and others explain why they believe in running a full-scale third-party campaign.

Hawkins’s book is a useful reminder of the corruption and predominance of corporate, militarist interests inherent in the Democratic Party. It helps to understand the dynamics already underway in the preliminary jockeying for the 2008 presidential race. John Edwards and Barack Obama are, to some extent, positional themselves as the “anti-war” candidates to the left of Hilary Clinton, and yet both Obama and Edwards have been unequivocal in their support of Israeli aggression and occupation. With precious few exceptions, in fact, “anti-war” Democrats in Congress and the Senate frame their calls for troop withdrawal from Iraq in terms of shoring up the interests of the U.S. Empire, in many cases calling for a massive redeployment to Afghanistan.

Back in 2004, a significant segment of the anti-war movement subordinated itself to the interests of Kerry, even though the Democratic candidate was running an aggressively pro-war campaign. The aristocratic, charisma-deprived Kerry began his war for the White House by “reporting for duty” at the party’s 2004 convention, which was a veritable pro-war rally. Al Sharpton’s thundering, way-over-time speech – “Bring the troops home, and send Bush back to Texas!” – was a wonderful exception to the Kerry rules, along with Dennis Kucinich’s quixotic campaign for the Democratic nomination.

For the Left in the United States that can’t, and won’t, stomach working in the Democratic Party, the Green Party is the most significant independent electoral force. In addition to community

activists and environmentalists, the Greens tent includes a number of former members of socialist and Marxist formations. Camejo is a notable example, having once been the presidential candidate of the US Socialist Workers Party, a group that long ago reduced itself to sectarian irrelevance.

Camejo and Hawkins, especially, make a convincing case for building the Green Party as a vehicle for both advancing the cause of diverse social movements and independent working class political action, in opposition to the official US labour movement's overwhelming orientation to the Democratic Party.

For those of us in Canada, *Independent Politics* evokes a haunting Phil Ochs lyric, 'There but for fortune, go you or I'. Even as powerful forces within labour and the NDP push for a more Blairist, Democratic Party approach, the tradition of independent politics – of a "labour party" in the traditional sense of being free of all corporate money and control – has not been wiped out completely.

Even though many veterans of the Left in Canada may feel like we're at a bit of nadir ourselves, we can be thankful that our forces are not as dispersed and marginal as those in the United States. And we can take heart from those who, faced with bluster and opprobrium from liberals and even from myriad "progressives", continue to struggle for a genuinely independent Left in the belly of the US beast.

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France's Election Campaign Reveals Deepening Political Crisis

By Dimitris Fotis

PARIS, MARCH 2007 — One of the most effective tricks used by the French ruling class to advance its class interests consists in “comparing” France to the rest of the Western world. In face of purportedly prosperous, debt-free, socially-peaceful and confident countries such as Canada, Ireland or Denmark, France appears to be stagnating, crisis-ridden, out-of-breath counterpart. Reforming the archaism of the Fifth Republic regime [1] and abolishing the burdens weighing on business is viewed as an urgent necessity by the different bourgeois parties. A break with the past 26 years of French politics has thus become the cardinal point of government parties in this campaign.

In this way, the current presidential election campaign reflects pressures on the capitalist class that stem from its political crisis.

The April 2002 presidential election was nothing less than an earthquake that struck the bourgeois leaders. It reflected the wide distance separating the people from those claiming to be its democratic representatives. The two main candidates, Jacques Chirac of the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) and Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party (SP), gathered only 37% of the first round votes. [2] The traditional, right and left two-party system has moreover been put into question by the breakthrough of the extreme-rightist Front National (FN). With 16.9% of the votes, it came second on the first round, ahead of Jospin whose 16.2% did not permit him to pass to the second round. The incapacity of the ruling political forces to gain the confidence of the masses is feeding the extreme right, while revolutionary perspectives gain momentum as well.

Union pour un Mouvement Populaire

The UMP candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, campaigns under the slogan “Together, everything becomes possible”. Even though he held key ministries at various times during the past five years of Chirac’s presidency, his main campaign theme is his so-called “quiet rupture” (“rupture tranquille”). Thoroughly critical of the Chiracian old guard, Sarkozy represents the best chance for the bourgeoisie to push through unpopular reforms and rid itself of the nation-embracing Gaullist shackles of the political right. Several commentators refer to him as the French equivalent of Margaret Thatcher.

This is particularly clear in the UMP’s program on economic issues. It defends reduction of public spending and the number of public service workers, weakening the working contracts of wage earners, abolition of the 35-hour work week, extension of working years before retirement, reducing taxation on business, and increased indirect taxation.

Sarkozy also wants to clamp down on “illegal” immigration and reduce immigration flows. These measures, which he has already put into practice as Minister of the Interior, are valuable

credentials for the extreme right electorate. This is notably illustrated by Sarkozy's FN-borrowed formula, "*La France, aimez-la ou quittez-la*" ("France: love her or leave her"), aimed to intimidate the foreign-born and the cultural minorities.

These rightist tendencies are counterbalanced by a claim to represent social justice, with references to the historic figures of French social democracy like Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum. Sarkozy defends the adoption of affirmative action measures in workplaces and higher education for French citizens that are Black or of North African origin. All things considered, Sarkozy claims to be the man whose firm hand can get things done and thus overcome the moral crisis of France's ruling class.

Socialist Party and UDF

The Socialist Party promotes a social-democratic line, with its slogan "Plus juste, la France sera plus forte" ("A more just France will be a stronger France"). The SP's candidate, Ségolène Royal, is trying to capture the anti-Sarkozy vote by portraying herself as the only left alternative. But Royal's campaign, just like Sarkozy's, reflects the will of the French bourgeoisie to change. Commentators were shocked at the beginning of the campaign when she invoked the idea of civilian juries to control elected representatives. Even though Royal never detailed the exact powers of such institutions, it nevertheless registers an implicit acknowledgement by the Socialists that the Fifth Republic's fate is coming to an end.

On many political questions, the SP tries to portray itself as the only alternative to the projects of the right-wingers. Thus, it opposes Sarkozy's campaign against public spending. Among the controversial measures of the SP's campaign, Royal wishes to abolish the school districts which assure a minimum of equality in public education through compulsory inscription in the household's residency area. Another debated measure is the confinement of delinquent youth to military re-education centres, which come down to official boot camps. All in all, Royal's campaign is not centred on the promotion of a left-wing line; it is mainly relying on her self-proclaimed "new way of doing politics"—more transparency, less party politics and petty rationalizations, closer attention to citizens' expectations.

The same can also be said for François Bayrou (Union pour la Démocratie Française – UDF) who has gained a hearing by promoting a centrist political program. He says that the left-right divide has been outlived and has lost its meaning. The main idea that Bayrou defends is to unite the "most talented" into a national union government, reuniting left and right, but whose core would be centrist. Even though his political record has seen him numerous times in different right-wing governments, Bayrou has succeeded to date in mobilizing dissatisfied UMP voters and, especially, Socialist voters. A second-round Bayrou-Sarkozy or Bayrou-Royal is thus not excluded.

Front National

Alongside the UMP and the SP, the extreme right-wing Front National represents another response to the political crisis of the ruling class. Jean-Marie Le Pen campaigns to end immigration, for expulsion of the undocumented ("*sans-papiers*"), and a "French first" policy for access to social security, unemployment insurance and job search programs. The FN also argues

for a tougher police force and a toughening of the courts to fight against youth delinquency and insecurity, which he portrays as a by-product of immigration.

The FN's entire political line is marked by its reactionary racism. The party's long history of anti-Semitism burst out in public in September 1987, when Le Pen argued on public television that the gas chambers were after all a "detail" in the history of the Second World War. Similarly, Bruno Gollnisch, member of the FN leadership and history professor, has been expelled from the History Department of the University of Lyon in 2004 for his revisionist views on the Holocaust. More recently, Le Pen argued in January 2005 that the Nazi Occupation "had not been particularly inhumane" in France.

Yet, the party's capacity to gain a hearing among workers remains intact in face of the deepening social divide, the political crisis of the ruling class and the absence of a clear class struggle alternative. It thus registers partial but sustained success in its nationalist campaign against the European Union, including the euro currency and the European Central Bank. Le Pen's latest novelty has been to denounce the short-term myopia and the destabilizing effects of financial capitalism. Last but not least, the FN campaign is trying to cast off its "extremist" image, dressing up instead in clothes of bourgeois respectability.

The Far Left

Beyond the capitalist parties, there are some formations that allow a working class voice to be heard in this electoral race. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) candidate, Olivier Besancenot, got 4.25% of the first round vote in the election of April 2002, and Lutte Ouvrière's Arlette Laguiller (LO) took 5.72%. The two candidates use their present campaign to reach out and broaden their hearing in the population. Both are fighting against the capitalist offensive on workers' living and working standards. Unemployment remains unresolved for millions whereas big business pocketed public aid programs to hire more. They also denounce the fiscal policy put forth by capitalist parties, which puts more and more financial pressure on low and medium-income households, and point to the need for a more progressive scale of taxation.

Both candidates had trouble in obtaining the 500 mayors' signatures necessary to validate their ballot status. The Fifth Republic constitution considers this procedure necessary to eliminate the "non-serious" candidates from running. But what is often depicted as a constitutional clause to ensure the good functioning of electoral democracy turns out to be, especially now, a significant obstacle for small parties' efforts to run. All of them challenged the restrictive policy of the main parties at the National Assembly (UMP, SP, UDF, PCF). For example, François Hollande, Secretary General of the SP, sent a letter in the early stages of the campaign to Socialist mayors to warn them against lending their signatures to left candidates. The participation of too many candidates, particularly on the left, is cited as a cause of the FN breakthrough in 2002.

LO and LCR militants explain that the only way to push back the profit-makers' offensive is massive organized class struggle, in the fashion of the mobilizations of 1995 and 2006. And they are among the only parties in the presidential race that fight alongside militants all-year round for more public housing and regularizing the status of the *sans-papiers*, or alongside strikers and unemployed engaged in fights against the bosses.

Communist Party

As for the Communist Party (PCF), its early campaign has centred on establishing its leadership of the left-wing forces among the heterogeneous “No camp” that won the May 2005 referendum on the European constitutional treaty. [3] The PCF’s political orientation consists of organizing a wide “anti-liberal” popular front that would take a significant part of the vote on the first round. It claims that such a result would create an alliance in a “plural left” government with the Socialists that could stop the “neoliberal” drive against working people.

While this political orientation enjoys undeniable support among militants of different far-left currents, the failure to date to bring about such a new “Popular Front” has deeper causes. The main question posed is nothing less than reform or revolution. Unlike the United States or Canada, state power has been in the hands of labor-oriented parties in France in the past: the latest episode followed the May 1981 elections that brought to the presidency Socialist François Mitterrand. A SP-PCF coalition then formed the government during the first years of the Mitterrand presidency. What was believed by the majority of the people to be the beginning of a new era turned out to be a nightmare. It was during the 1980s and the first half of the 90s that the barons of industry and finance carried out an unrelenting offensive on labor.

So bad were the assaults presided over by an SP government that Chirac won the presidency in 1995 by campaigning against the “fracture sociale” (social divide) that was deepened during the term of his “Socialist” predecessor. Likewise, the Jospin government of 1997-2002 registered the failure of another “plural left” coalition to put a stop to the widening social gap and regain the confidence of the popular classes.

Where does all that leave us in 2007? The picture seems clear — as in April 2002, demoralization and isolation continue to plague large sections of the toiling majority. Some even consider voting FN only to “put an end to all of it”, thinking that the “system” will explode that way. Moreover, the feeling that there is no alternative to capitalism and its horrors, of liberal or social-democratic flavour, has gained ground and has oriented people to find individual solutions to their problems.

If there are any lessons to be learned from history, class struggle militants should fight against the “plural left” line of the PCF, even if it appears appealing at first glance. Experience shows that each time that labor parties tried to “manage” capitalism while trying to reform it, the consequences for workers were disastrous and deep. This does not mean that a reformist left-wing government cannot be supported by militants. Conditional support with no blank cheque to the SP and PCF leaders seems a more sound approach to the question. As for accusations of sectarianism, the claim is mistaken. It is no surprise that a compromise between the PCF, LO and LCR was sought but not possible. The LCR leadership thought it was possible to collaborate with reformist forces who were in the No camp during the 2005 referendum campaign, but this ended with no results. In the eyes of LO, the No camp could not furnish the basis of a lasting political collaboration among organizations with deeply differing orientations.

The Unmentioned Issue: French Imperialism

The great unmentioned issue in the present election is French foreign policy. And yet France's role in the world is far from passive. Until now, France has played a leading role among Western imperialist powers in mounting pressure on Iran's efforts to build civil nuclear-power plants. French troops are participating in the occupation of Afghanistan (1100 troops), Lebanon (1650 troops) and Haiti (40 troops). They are also stationed in neo-colonial African countries whose regimes are near collapse, including war-torn Ivory Coast (3350 troops), Chad (1100 troops), and the Central-African Republic (220 troops).

The absence of any questioning of foreign policy in the presidential campaign reveals two features of French politics. First of all, most of the ruling class representatives and ideologues are united behind the national flag over international questions. Everyone agrees for example on the "wisdom" of the Chirac-Villepin position of non-intervention in the war in Iraq. Similarly, there is no doubt in ruling circles that foreign policy worldwide must seek to strengthen French "national interests."

But the absence of any major debate around these questions also reflects the accomplishments of the mass media. Their year-round propaganda campaign to legitimize French imperialist interventions, makes it seem almost natural to most working people that during the presidential race these issues do not come up — since "everyone agrees" why bother with these foreign issues? Even among workers' parties there is alignment with the silence of the capitalist parties on these matters.

Working people do not expect much from the coming elections. Whatever the results, the vital questions for the toiling majority can be expected to remain unresolved. Housing problems, mass unemployment, a dwindling purchasing power, erosion of social programs, lengthening of the workweek and speedup of production will continue to be the lot of millions, as they have for the past three decades.

But this political equilibrium has many chances to change in the near future, under the whip of deepening ruling class attacks. During the winter of 1995-96, a vast movement of public workers blocked government attempts to dismantle part of their social benefits. Likewise, in the spring of 2006, millions followed the students into the streets to protest the Villepin government's attempt to impose a new hiring contract for youth that would have sharply reduced rights on the job, including protection against unjust firings.

Bourgeois spokesmen argue that these mass movements show why France is lagging behind the neo-liberal standards of the day. Their class prejudices prevent them from seeing that during these periods of social upheaval, those who normally have no say in public affairs burst out official channels and intervene directly in the politics of the Republic. The protests in France, like the massive politicization of the toiling millions in Bolivia, Venezuela and Mexico, provide a vivid example of what can legitimately be called "real politics".

Notes:

[1] The Fifth Republic is the fifth and current republican constitution of France. It was introduced in 1958.

[2] The presidential election in France takes place in two rounds. The top two finishers in the first round square off in a second round..

[3] In May 2005, a majority of French voters rejected proposed acceptance of a new European constitution to replace the French constitution. The result was a blow to the efforts of French rulers to “modernize” their constitution and bring it more into line with their European Union allies.

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The Onkwehonwe Democratic Agenda

By Kahentinetha Horn

Kahentinetha Horn is a longtime indigenous rights activist from the Mohawk Nation. She was involved in the 1962 Conference on Indian Poverty in Washington D.C., the blocking of the International Bridge at Akwesasne in 1968, and other indigenous rights campaigns.

In the summer of 1990, she was behind the Canadian Army razor wires that surrounded the Mohawk compound in Kanehsatake. This was the historic Mohawk land rights struggle that became known as the "Oka Crisis." After almost 20 years of service, Kahentinetha was fired by the Department of Indian Affairs for her involvement there.

More recently Kahentinetha has been involved with the Kahnawake Elders Council, and was active at the Six Nations Land reclamation near Caledonia, Ontario, publishing and distributing almost daily accounts of the developments there.

Kahentinetha Horn is an editor for Mohawk Nation News, a daily news service that she founded during the Oka crisis. Recently, Mohawk Nation News came online. It features articles on Mohawk struggles and other issues affecting indigenous people across turtle island and beyond. Check out the site at www.mohawknationnews.com.

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The Onkwehonwe Democratic Agenda

By Kahentinetha Horn

We've been complaining about the top-down bureaucratic agenda of the colonizers. Do we have something to replace it? Yes we do. It's called the "Kaianerehkowa/Great Law of Peace" [the constitution of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy].

Our philosophy can be used to build a society based on peace, power and righteousness. These words have meanings that are deeply rooted in our culture and completely different from the kinds of expectations they raise among the colonized. Our understanding of these concepts has nothing in common with the command and obedience model of predatory capitalism or the exploitation of ordinary people for the power and profit of a few. The new (colonial) world order is opposite to our way of life based on the principles of fully informed consent and consensus in all our relationships.

Stephen Lendman, in CounterCurrent.org, describes how Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has "constructed socialism from below", built "from the base" in the communities." He has found a way to rebuild Venezuelan society. He wants a coalition of smaller parties whose power comes from the communities.

Chavez thinks this is the way democracy should work. A lot of ordinary people agree.

There are presently 16,000 regional federations of Communal Councils organized across the country that deal with local issues. Each represent 200 to 400 families. That number is expected to grow to 21,000 councils by the end of 2007. This new state is driven by the same basic philosophy of egalitarian human respect that underlies the Kaianerehkowa.

A decentralized government will distribute billions of dollars to these Councils. If the people so chose, billions can be put into a "National Development Fund." Yellow journalism has been attacking this thinking. They put fear into people's minds, calling it "nationalization", which is a dirty word to capitalists and colonialists. Capitalism is a one way road for the privileged few. Development of democratic programs look threatening to those who are at the top of the old hierarchal heap.

As we assert our sovereignty, we have lots to think about. What can we Onkwehonwe do with all our land and resources and all the squatters who are here? The land belongs to us and our future generations. It always will. All our resource revenues can be used to compensate the colonists fairly. The rest can be put towards rebuilding a safe and healthy environment.

U.S., Canada and Mexico will, of course, become irrelevant. These cancerous organizations don't belong. They are trying to kill the hosts. That's us. Then they'll kill everybody else! Where will that leave them?

The old hierarchies will cling to their delusional powers. They will keep their guns pointed at us and try to invent more lethal weapons. We'll have to bring out the feathers and start tickling them so they can let down their defenses and so they can grab a shovel and take part. If they don't, we might have to ask them to leave. Their hysterical megalomania is getting them involved in serious violations of international accords. If they're not careful, they could be declared persona non grata worldwide.

With all the money from our land and resources, we could buy out the big corporations so that we have the major shares, say 40%, as Chavez is doing. The rest can be joint ventures with us. In other words, we want all these companies under the control of the people. The colonists can have shares after we take everything out of private control.

The people must control the energy sector, including oil production. Private investors can still play a role. But it will be based on joint ventures that include the people as decision makers, not just consumers.

The money should be put back into our hands, out of the hands of private for-profit bankers. We would invest it into worthwhile projects that restore and protect the land so that the coming generations can be healthy, happy and prosperous. The days of genocide and exploitation are over. We must benefit from our resource revenues and other businesses that provide essential services like public utilities. Clean drinking water and fresh air to breathe would be top priorities.

It goes without saying that Indian Affairs terrorism has to go. There is no excuse for that organization to exist. Its very existence is founded on a misinterpretation of the BNA Act, the constitution of Canada. Britain could only give Canada the authority to negotiate with us. There

is no authority under the BNA Act, under international law, or under any treaty to make laws for us.

We have to dismantle the “Tower of Terror” in Hull. Communal power at the grass roots will be the order of the day. Kaianerehkowa can make this happen and can be the start of a real egalitarian and humanistic society.

All social structures will have to be reorganized. Selections of local officials, the economy, finance, banking, transportation, security, public safety and policies related to energy are part of this. There is no need for a top heavy governmental structure when everyone takes responsibility at all levels.

The current colonial bureaucracy will have to be dismantled. Corruption and greed are major problems. They are products of hierarchy. They will naturally disappear when egalitarian democratic structures are put in place.

The changes needed aren't such a big deal. As long as existing representatives are carrying out the will of the people, they may remain in their positions.

All procedures and decision-making must be public and the work of all administrative officials will be subject to constant review. They have to look out for the people and their directions, instead of looking up to the artificial bosses. They can be removed from office if they do not follow the people's directions or heed our warnings. All must be given the experience of being a representative so that we can all learn how to help the people. It is important for everyone to learn how difficult it is to serve.

Social justice and economic independence must be based on equitable distribution of national wealth. Education is most important. The habit of censorship has to end. Racism must be eliminated from all school curricula. All students need to learn our points of view on history. They have to know what really happened to us. They have to know that this land belongs to us and our future generations. Science and technology has to benefit all of the people. So must health, the environment, biodiversity, industry, quality of life and security. We have to take up our responsibility and take charge of our own lives.

Social issues can and must be resolved through consensus. We will have to rethink the need for a judiciary. We cannot give anyone power to harm civil or human rights of our people or even of our opponents. Resources must be taken care of, not exploited. The products of the land must be distributed fairly. No one will become desperate enough to want to sell their soul to the devil.

Our young people have a job to do. They can be part of the first wave of reeducation. Every person has a responsibility throughout their lives to educate the people they meet and the coming generations.

Our way is to manage our own relations with all other countries. The colonial states are squatting on our land. They do not represent us.

The people they brought here do not need to fear us. We will not expropriate private property. Right of occupancy can be given to people. The land will always belong as it always has to the future generations of the Onkwehonwe.

We are hoping that the last days of the colonial system are at hand. Democracy and colonialism cannot coexist. Colonialism is a military or civilian “dictatorship” derived from a combination of isolation, overarching greed and an attempt to pull local and global forces together to control all the people and the resources of the world.

Savage capitalism is in its death throes. It is fighting to stay alive. Because of this, it’s becoming more and more vicious. It is important for everyone to stay grounded at this time. We are all working for each other and for the future generations.

The colonial nations are on the tipping edge of fascism. They combine elements of corporatism, patriotism, nationalism and the delusion of an Almighty-directed mission. It requires an iron-fisted militarist agenda with thugs like “Homeland Security” illegally spying on everyone. In this system everything is for sale to the few who can pay.

Colonialism is out of date, illegal and so yesterday. No longer will the armies oppress and kill for the key resources, markets and cheap labor where “might makes right” and any difference of opinion will not be tolerated.

Our youth are precious to us. The Los Angeles Times did a story about “A wildly successful Venezuelan program that makes musical instruments and training available, free of charge, to all children.” This gives children something constructive to do. Unlike the U.S. model that Canada copies, the kids are exercising their minds instead of exercising their thumbs playing video games.

Instead of a make-work program for police and social workers who try to slot kids into a system of jail and imprisonment, Chavez created a musical education program called “El Sistema.” 500,000 children from all strata of society get training at more than 120 centers around the country. More than 200 youth orchestras have been created. Training in music is known to develop math skills in the young to prepare them later for professional training. There’s no problem keeping guns out of the kids’ hands. They’re too busy making music. That Chavez knows what he is doing.

Instead of punishing youth, we inspire them. As the author, Paul Cummins, put it, “We reap what we sow, and we don’t harvest what we don’t plant.”

The Chavez approach is actually much less expensive than the multi-billion dollar state-sponsored iron-fisted prison system and militarist Homeland Security “thuggery.”

Another savage effect of the capitalist hierarchy is homelessness. One-way wealth distribution siphons everything upwards except for a few crumbs that are handed to the middle class while nothing goes to the millions on the bottom who are the most in need. They all hope we will just go away. We won’t. Neither will our needs. We come from a participatory tradition which can eliminate the greedy fantasies of colonialism.

Many who come from repressive societies are unable to see a bottom-up model of relationships. We have shown that we always resisted enslavement.

Free expression is part of an open democratic society. No more secrecy or lies. No more corporate media support for capitalists and colonial states. No more thought-control police to mock our efforts at free expression which is vital to a healthy transition from tyranny to democracy. The “thought police” don’t want us to say what is on our minds. They don’t want us to think. We can and will do it because the Kaianerehkowa mandates it. People in the far south of the border are trying to get back on the natural path that has always been there, for us and for everyone. This can be done without a war and without global interference.