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Socialist Voice #162, April 9, 2007

Building a Fighting Labour Movement in Canada Today

by Roger Annis

[This talk was presented by Roger Annis on March 10, 2007, to the Vancouver Socialist Education Conference organized by Vancouver-area readers and writers of Socialist Voice. Approximately 70 people attended three sessions of discussion and debate on some of the key political issues facing Marxists and other working class activists today.]

I have been a wage worker and union member for my 35-year working life. I have been a member of diverse unions, including postal workers, railworkers, steelworkers, and paper workers. For the past 10 years, I have worked as an aircraft assembler. I am a member of the Machinists union.

In all this time, I have been on strike three times. In 1974, we went on a wildcat strike at the Post Office to protest the unjust firing of a union shop steward. In 1976, my union joined the one-day general strike across Canada to protest federal government-imposed wage controls. And in 1979, we were on strike at a large steel mill in a fight to win a new collective agreement.

That's not much strike action over 35 years, especially as each one was rather tame. But my experience is similar to that of most workers in Canada today. We have grown up in a political period that has known only episodic examples of the "fighting labour movement" referred to in my title. So let's start by asking what such a movement would look like.

The Working Class in Canada

Marxism holds that those in capitalist society who neither own capital nor profit from the labour of others and who live by our labour have a material interest in fighting for socialism. We constitute a social class that Marxists call the “working class.” Our ranks include not only those who work for wages. They also include those who do not or cannot work, be they laid-off or injured workers, people living a subsistence livelihood in remote or poorly developed regions, women at home raising children, young people in between school and a working life, retired people on modest pensions, and so on.

The working class suffers all the inequalities and exploitation that this society dishes out. We live in perilous conditions in which our jobs and livelihoods are scarred by racism, sexism, economic uncertainty, wars, environmental destruction, and all the other terrible features of capitalist society. We have a vested interest in putting an end to capitalism through establishing a government of working people that leads a socialist transformation in Canada and joins a worldwide struggle for socialism.

Working farmers have similar interests in establishing such a government. So, too, do small-scale producers of commodities or services—teachers, artisans, cultural performers, etc. And in the course of their struggles they need to create alliances with the special victims of capitalist oppression, such as Canada’s oppressed nationalities.

Moreover, we share a common interest with the exploited and oppressed peoples of the world as a whole in resisting a social system whose wars and environmental degradation threaten the very survival of humankind.

In Canada and Quebec, the modern working class has never waged a fight for political power. But we have seen many examples of a “fighting labour movement.” The years following both world wars were tumultuous and saw, at various times, mass trade union organizing drives, general strikes for improvements in living and working conditions, and mass farmer-organizing drives. During the 1960s and 1970s in Quebec, trade unions and other social organizations waged huge struggles for social, language, and national rights. A province-wide general strike occurred in 1972. In 1990, the Mohawk people waged an historic fight for land rights in regions adjacent to Montreal.

Here in British Columbia in just the last few years, we have lived through some major struggles by the trade unions that offer a glimpse of the fighting labour movement we seek to create. These recent experiences have important lessons for us and I want to focus some remarks on them.

Union Battles in British Columbia

In April-May 2004, several tens of thousands of health care workers, members of the CUPE-affiliated Hospital Employees Union (HEU), went on strike. They were fighting to preserve their jobs, wages, and conditions of work. But something much larger was at stake. The workers were also on strike to defend the public health care system against ferocious attacks by the Liberal Party government of Gordon Campbell, elected in 2001, and the federal Liberal government of Jean Chrétien. The rage aroused by Campbell’s attacks was all the greater since he had vigorously denied during the 2001 election campaign any intention to cut back the public health care system.

The HEU strike touched a very deep chord in the working class, and we saw strong and forceful acts of solidarity coming forward from all sectors of society. The strike began to take on the elements of a political strike, one that would challenge the very legitimacy of the hated Campbell government. Had the actions of solidarity continued, they would have forced the resignation of the government and the calling of an election in which quality health care and the ruthless, class character of the existing government would be front and center.

A strike of teachers in British Columbia in the fall of 2005 followed a similar pattern. Teachers were demanding an end to cuts to their jobs and salaries and attacks on the public education system as a whole. In so doing, they sparked a broad and growing movement of solidarity from other unions and from working-class people as a whole. Once again, the entire government policy of sharp attacks on social services was being challenged.

The teachers strike also presented the possibility for unions in British Columbia to come to the aid of embattled workers at the Telus telecommunication corporation. Several tens of thousands of Telus workers were engaged in a very bitter and sometimes violent strike that began weeks before the teachers walked out and was dragging on with no end in sight.

The health care and Telus strikes went down to very painful defeat. A four-day strike by 4,000 ferry workers in December 2004 was also defeated. Teachers won limited concessions because they were in a stronger moral and political position to resist legal and political threats to break their strike.

Some Lessons

During the HEU and teachers' strikes, some unions were walking off the job in support, and many others were giving signs that they, too, were willing to walk off the job. But the BC Federation of Labour and its affiliates did not mobilize to defend these workers; they thereby signaled to other potential allies of the strikers that nothing could be done. This doomed the strikes to defeat. An historic opportunity to fight the federal and provincial governments' attacks on social services and democratic rights was lost. The poorest sections of society in British Columbia continue to suffer under the lash of government policy with barely a peep of protest from the unions and their political party, the New Democratic Party.

We are living a seeming paradox in today's capitalist economy. The capitalists are earning massive profits, and their governments, in Canada at least, are awash in tax revenue and surpluses. In British Columbia, billions of dollars of public money are being thrown into the sinkhole of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver; billions more are earmarked for the highway, bridge, and port expansion, the so-called "Gateway" projects.

Yet, cuts to social programs are continuing apace. Health care services and standards are in decline. Public education is suffering. The federal government's unemployment insurance program has a \$50 billion (!) surplus, and access is harder than ever. Homelessness is rampant and growing, and welfare rates cannot sustain human life. So why are workers' conditions worsening in a society of seeming abundance?

Society is creating more wealth than ever. But those who own and control that wealth face more and more competition to maintain their profits and privileges. So rather than admit the failing of their capitalist system and allow a superior form of human social organization, socialism, to take over, they fight with tooth and nail to preserve their dying order.

The working classes around the world need to organize politically and take control of government in order to reorganize society. But we face two interconnected problems along that road:

One, our political and trade union officials are not leading. They offer no vision and no program for a fight to defend and advance workers rights. Thus, at the critical moments of the hospital, ferry, teachers, and Telus strikes, leaders of the BC Federation of Labour and its affiliates backed down from a head-on fight with the provincial government and blocked mass action.

And two, workers see no alternative but to seek individual solutions to societal problems. Your rent is too high, or there's no social housing available? Take out a mortgage and buy a house, or renovate your basement and become a landlord. Inadequate pension income? Put money into an RRSP. Wages too low? Take a second job, or push your children into the labour force. And so on.

A fighting labour movement would have welcomed the challenges of the HEU, ferry workers, teachers' and Telus workers' strikes in British Columbia. It would have mobilized the unions and others to win these strikes and to force changes in government policy. Equally important, it would champion the causes of the most oppressed in our society—indigenous people fighting for land, social and national rights; young people unable to find a job; people needing a higher minimum wage or welfare rates; women victimized by systematic sexism; drug addicts receiving police abuse instead of treatment for their addictions.

Is Electioneering the Answer?

Instead, we are told to tighten our belts, wait for the next election, and elect an NDP government that may legislate to meet our concerns. In British Columbia, we have the embarrassing spectacle of the unions and the NDP supporting the 2010 Winter Olympic boondoggle and all its consequences — growing homelessness, rising taxes and housing prices, expanding roadways, and consequent air pollution. And where opposition to the Olympics has surfaced in official circles, such as among some members of the Vancouver COPE municipal party, that opposition has been ineffectual.

In reality, the NDP today, when in power, acts much like other capitalist governments. So when workers elect this party to government, we must mobilize to ensure that the modest reforms in the NDP program are enacted. No deep-going process of social change is possible unless working people unite in their communities and their workplaces to press it forward.

A good current example of a more combative labour movement is in Venezuela. The Bolivarian movement there began in modest fashion, by winning a presidential election on a reform program. But when the employers said, "No," the masses came into action, organizing in their

communities, remaking their unions, and mobilizing in the streets. In this fashion, they have advanced from victory to victory.

A Special Task – Defending the Oppressed Nationalities

One of the key responsibilities in building a fighting labour movement today is to forge unity with the oppressed nationalities and victims of racial discrimination. In B.C., indigenous people are the special victims of the Olympics juggernaut. They are losing housing as low-rent hotels in downtown Vancouver become transformed into high-priced hotels or condos. Their lands are being stolen to build more ski hills or highways. Their pressing health and education needs continue to be sacrificed on the altar of financial subsidies for Olympics facilities.

Canada's French-speaking nationalities also require our support and solidarity. The Québécois fight for political independence is a progressive struggle because it affirms basic language and political rights, and it also gives a progressive political dimension to the struggle by workers for economic and social advancement.

The 300,000 Acadian people in Atlantic Canada and the half million people of French language in the other provinces face cultural and language assimilation, and often receive inferior social services and job opportunities, depending on where they live. They, too, deserve support in their struggles.

Political Action by Workers in Canada

I said earlier that the road to transforming society runs through the establishment of political power, that is, a government of the working people that can lead the struggle against capitalist rule and carry through a socialist transformation. Where does political action stand today across Canada?

The working class in Canada is saddled with parties that don't even fight for meaningful reforms. The New Democratic Party has always accepted the capitalist rules of the game. But once upon a time, it fought for such vital reforms as pensions, health care and unemployment insurance. It opposed the war in Vietnam and opposed the 1970 declaration of the War Measures Act against the Quebec independence movement. Today, the NDP speaks out only episodically on the correct side of a political issue; overall, it accepts the logic and dictates of capital. Thus, it supports the Canadian military occupations in Afghanistan and Haiti and does nothing to oppose the war in Iraq that it says it opposes.

A similar description applies to the NDP's municipal cousin in Vancouver, COPE. This is a party that has provided no effective opposition to the Olympics juggernaut and has next to nothing to propose about the housing crisis and other social ills in Vancouver. It relies on backroom deals and polite lobbying to get things done for working people, and the results are next to nil.

A growing number of NDP and trade union leaders are seeking to weaken the already weak organizational and political ties between the party and the unions. Some even wish to embrace the Liberal Party. These are steps backwards because the NDP is an important arena for the

unions to fight for pro-working class policies and to wage a struggle for a government truly representative of workers' interests.

The situation in Quebec is today more favorable for working class political action. Although most unions act in the political arena as appendages of two capitalist parties— the Parti québécois (provincial) and the Bloc québécois (federal) — something new and important has emerged. Last year, labour and other social activists founded a new party, Québec solidaire. *Socialist Voice* #103 reported on Québec solidaire's founding platform. While the party has not yet adopted a socialist and pro-working class program, its formation is an important step in that direction that deserves support and participation. Outside of Quebec, we should work to make this party known. (In the recent Quebec election, the new party received just under 4% of the vote—Editors.)

Marxists Face Up to the Challenges of Our Times

The challenge facing Marxists today in Canada and internationally is to be a part of the unfolding resistance to the employers' offensive. We must join and provide leadership to the struggles waged by unions, the poor, and women's rights advocates. We must also learn from popular struggles, such as those of the indigenous peoples. We have a special responsibility to join with the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle and deepen solidarity with the peoples in countries like Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia, where working people are struggling to use political power to refashion society in their interests.

Marxists have a unique and vital contribution to make to the working class struggle in all its dimensions. We bring the lessons from previous struggles and we bring a clear outlook on what is needed to put an end to war, environmental destruction, and other injustices.

To do all that, we must ourselves become better organized and more unified. All of us who organized this conference are keenly aware of past failures to do this. Some of us come from political organizations that are no longer playing a unifying role, that have succumbed to narrow group interest and sectarianism. But if Cuba and Venezuela teach us anything, it is that the challenge doesn't go away; we must draw the lessons of past accomplishments and then move forward.

We are not starting from zero. We are building upon the important practical and theoretical achievements of those who have come before us. The peoples of Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, and other Latin American countries are today struggling to make new political and social leaps forward, and to draw the rest of the continent in with them. We can and must learn from these examples and many others around the world and become more and more a part of the worldwide struggle that is emerging against capitalism and imperialism.

Socialist Voice #163, April 12, 2007

From resistance to power! Declaration of Iximche'

Introduction by Phil Cournoyer, *Socialist Voice*

MANAGUA. Below is the final declaration of the III Continental Summit of Indigenous Nations and Pueblos of Abya Yala — “From resistance to power” — that took place March 26 to 30 in Iximche', Guatemala. Abya Yala is an indigenous name for North and South America taken from the language of the Kuna people of Panama, and has been widely accepted since first introduced to an earlier continental gathering in 1992.

Iximche' is a sacred Maya site and main city of the Kaqchikel Maya people. US President George W. Bush visited the Mayan Iximche' temple during his Latin American tour two weeks prior to the indigenous Summit. Hence, an important aspect of Mayan preparations for the continental gathering was a special spiritual ceremony to drive off his bad spirits and cleanse the site.

Over two thousand delegates from 24 countries (and definitely more First Nations) participated in the gathering. Conference planners launched a [bilingual Spanish-English website](#) to help plan and build the conference, and to promote its decisions and campaigns.

The Summit received very little coverage on mainstream wire services and media outlets.

Nor has the press of left, anti/imperialist, socialist, and workers movements in the Americas given it much coverage. This reflects a near chronic and lamentable failure to understand the pivotal role of indigenous struggles in the current anti/imperialist upsurge throughout Latin America, above all in Bolivia.

Many indigenous leaders think the Summit registers an advance for indigenous peoples in the hemisphere because it took on frontally question of political power, as signalled in main theme “From Resistance to Power” and in the following point from the final declaration:

“To consolidate the processes now in effect to strengthen the re-foundation of the government states and the construction of pluri-national states and pluri-cultural societies via Constituent Assemblies with direct representation of the Indigenous Pueblos and Nations.”

This issue is pivotal in at least four countries — Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Guatemala, with Bolivia being the most advanced expression of indigenous power and struggle for liberation.

Of course, the political gains signalled by the third continental Summit build on the achievements of previous discussions and gatherings.

The evolution of this broad and varied discussion shows that indigenous fighters have been grappling with many of the same problems as other oppressed and exploited sectors – questions such as the debate over “from below versus from above” strategies for changing the system; or how to prevent participation in electoral processes from undermining the enduring strength of the

movement which is in the streets and the communities, in grassroots mobilizations, and struggles around concrete demands.

Miguel Quispe, a key Summit organizer and representative of Peru's indigenous nations on the recently created Continental Coordinating Body for the Indigenous Nations and Peoples of Abya Yala, told reporters from the Buenos Aires daily *Página 12* that "decisions are not taken in mobilizations, but in governments (states). We must keep in mind that we have to build a different kind of power, an alternative power to confront the crisis in our countries. Linking up with unions, social movements, teachers, students, the Church, will help us to build an all-inclusive political movement."

And Juana Quispe, a member of the Bolivian parliament for the MAS [Movement for Socialism] reinforced his point, arguing that "participation in politics and becoming authorities is a must. The people must become the government and perform well. Indigenous people are suffering but so are poor people in the cities. We must unite with them against the Yankee military, political and economic apparatus, and the transnationals" (*La Cumbre indígena*, Diego González and Lucía Alvarez, *Página 12*, April 1, 2007, SV translation)

Marc Becker, a Latin America historian and a founder of NativeWeb, writes that:

"[f]or an Indigenous summit, the declaration is perhaps notable for its lack of explicit ethnic discourse. Instead, it spoke of struggles against neoliberalism and for food sovereignty. On one hand, this pointed to the Indigenous movement's alignment with broader popular struggles in the Americas. On the other, it demonstrated a maturation of Indigenous ideologies that permeate throughout the human experience. Political and economic rights were focused through a lens of Indigenous identity, with a focus on concrete and pragmatic actions. For example, in justifying the declaration's condemnation of the construction of a wall on the United States/Mexico border, Tonatierra's Tupac Enrique Acosta declared that nowhere in the Americas could Indigenous peoples be considered immigrants because colonial borders were imposed from the outside." (Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples Meets in Guatemala).

Strong winds from the indigenous victory in Bolivia prevailed at the Iximche' gathering. This was appreciated not only by delegates from South and Mesoamerica, but also from north of the Rio Bravo.

Joe Kennedy, a delegate from the Western Shoshone Nation (United States), messaged his community that "The III Continental Summit of Indigenous Nations and Pueblos of Abya Yala marks a new phase in the relationship between the nations of Indigenous Peoples and the government states of the Americas. One of the most telling examples of this fact is the presence of the minister of foreign relations for the Bolivian government, Mr. David Choquehuanca who on Monday addressed the inaugural session of the Summit Abya Yala in representation of President Evo Morales of Bolivia. President Morales himself is scheduled to arrive at the Summit Abya Yala on Friday to attend the official closure of the five day gathering." (As it turned out Morales was unable to attend the conference closing rally, as planned, but sent a written message.)

Kennedy, a Western Shoshone National Council member, established a diplomatic precedent for the hemisphere by entering the Maya Territories (Guatemala) using his Western Shoshone passport.

Further information about the Summit can also be found on the [Tonatierra site](#).

III Continental Summit of Indigenous Nations and Pueblos of Abya Yala

Declaration of Iximche' — From resistance to power!

Iximche', Guatemala, March 30, 2007.

We the children of the Indigenous Nations and Pueblos of the continent, self convened and gathered at the III Continental Summit of Indigenous Nations and Pueblos of Abya Yala realized in Iximche', Guatemala the days of Oxlajuj Aq'abal, thirteen powers of the Spirit of the Dawn (26th of March) to Kají Kej, four powers of the Spirit of the Deer (30th of March, 2007):

We hereby affirm the Declaration of Teotihuacan (Mexico, 2000), the Declaration of Kito (Ecuador, 2004) and ratify our millennial principles of complementarity, reciprocity and duality, as well as the struggle for our territories in order to preserve our Mother Nature and the autonomy and self-determination of our Indigenous Peoples. We announce the continental resurgence of the Pachacutic (the return) along with the closure of Oxlajuj Baq'tun (long count of 5,200 years) and as we approach the door of the new Baq'tun, we journey together to make of Abya Yala a "land full of life".

We have survived centuries of colonization and now face the imposition of the policies of neo-liberalism that perpetuates the dispossession and sacking of our territories, the domination of all of social space and ways of life of the Indigenous Peoples, causing the degradation of our Mother Nature as well as poverty and migration by way of the systematic intervention in the sovereignty of our Nations by transnational companies in complicity with the government states.

In preparation to face and confront the challenges of the new times upon us, we now determine:

- To commit to the process of alliance among our indigenous nations, and among our indigenous nations and the movements for social justice of the continent that would allow us to collectively confront the policies of neo-liberalism and all forms of oppression.
- To make accountable the government states for the ongoing dispossession of our territories and the extinction of the indigenous peoples of the continent, due to impunity for the transnational corporations and their genocidal practices, as well as the lack of political will on the part of the United Nations in not advancing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and failure to guarantee the full respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- To ratify the ancestral and historical rights to our territories and the common resources of Mother Nature, reaffirming the inalienable character of these rights as being non-negotiable, unquantifiable, without impediment, and unrenounceable even to the cost of our lives.

- To consolidate the processes now in effect to strengthen the re-foundation of the government states and the construction of pluri-national states and pluri-cultural societies via Constituent Assemblies with direct representation of the Indigenous Pueblos and Nations.
- To advance in the exercise of our right of autonomy and self determination as Indigenous Peoples, in spite of the lack of legal recognition by the government states.
- To ratify our rejection of the Free Trade Agreements (FTA's) that make vulnerable the sovereignty of our Pueblos and to remain vigilant against similar intentions to implement new commercial agreements.
- To reaffirm our decision to defend the nutritional sovereignty and struggle against the trans-genetic invasion, convoking all peoples of the world to join this struggle in order to guarantee our future.
- To ratify the struggle for the democratization of communication and the implementation of public policies that contemplate specific applications for indigenous peoples and the promotion of inter-culturality.
- To alert the indigenous peoples regarding the policies of the Inter American Development Bank, the World Bank and organizations of the like that penetrate our communities with actions of assistance and cooptation whose aim is the fragmentation of autonomous and legitimate indigenous organizations.

For the well being of the Indigenous Peoples, we now decide:

- To demand of the international financial institutions and the government states the cancellation of policies that promote concessions for the extractive industries (mining, oil, forestry, natural gas and water) from our indigenous territories.
- To condemn the policies of exclusion of President Bush and the government of the United States demonstrated in the act of construction of the wall along the border with Mexico while at the same time attempting to expropriate the common resources of our Mother Nature of all the peoples of Abya Yala by implementing expansionist plans and acts of war.
- To condemn the intolerant attitude of the government states that do not recognize the rights of indigenous peoples, in particular those which have not ratified nor guaranteed the application of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization.
- To condemn the imposter and terrorist democracies implemented by the neoliberal governments, which results in the militarization of our indigenous territories and the criminalization of our legitimate indigenous struggle and the movements for social justice throughout Abya Yala.

In order to enact these words and realize our dreams, from resistance to power:

- We constitute ourselves as the Continental Coordinator of Indigenous Pueblos and Nations of Abya Yala, creating a permanent vehicle of linkage and interchange, in order

to converge our experiences and proposals, so that together we can confront the neo-liberal policies of globalization and to struggle for the definitive liberation of our indigenous Pueblos and Nations, of the mother earth, of our territories, of the waters, and entirety of our natural patrimony in order that we may all live well.

In this process we delineated the following actions:

- To fortify the organizational processes and struggle of the Indigenous Peoples with the full participation of our women, children and young people.
- To convene a Continental Summit of Indigenous Women of Abya Yala and a Continental Summit of the Children, Adolescents and Youth of the Indigenous Nations and Pueblos of Abya Yala.
- To convoke a continental mobilization of Indigenous Peoples to save Mother Nature from the disasters caused by capitalism, manifested by global warming, to be realized on the 12th of October of 2007.
- To actively engage the diplomatic mission of the Indigenous Peoples to defend and to guarantee the rights of our Indigenous Pueblos and Nations.
- To endorse the candidacy for the Nobel Peace Prize of our brother Evo Morales Ayma, President of Bolivia.
- To demand the decriminalization of the coca leaf. “We have dreamt our past and we remember our future”

Socialist Voice #164, April 16, 2007

Sovereigntists Open Debate on Quebec’s Post-Election Prospects

By Richard Fidler

Quebec has entered a new period of political instability in the wake of the March 26 general election. For decades, the province’s politics have been polarized between the federalist Liberals (PLQ) and the sovereigntist Parti Québécois. Now the sudden ascension of a relatively new right-wing “autonomist” party, the Action Démocratique du Québec, has reduced the governing Liberals to minority status in the National Assembly. The PQ, which entered the campaign with polls giving it a credible chance to regain power, is now the third party. The PQ’s share of the popular vote is its lowest since the early 1970s.

Elections in capitalist democracies reflect the underlying trends within society with all the accuracy of a fun-house mirror, especially in an undemocratic first-past-the-post system like Quebec’s. All the more so in a period when the nationalist and labour mobilizations that have periodically shaken Quebec since the Sixties are in ebb. What if anything do these elections tell us about the evolution of Quebec society, and the state of the sovereigntist movement?

Quebec general election results, 2007						
Party*	Seats			Popular Vote		
	2003	2007	Change	#	%	Change
Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ)	76	48	-28	1,313,780	33.08	-12.91%
Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ)	4	41	+37	1,223,477	30.80	+12.63%
Parti québécois (PQ)	45	36	-9	1,125,078	28.33	-4.91%
Green Party of Quebec (PVQ)	–	–	–	154,367	3.89	+3.45%
Québec solidaire (QS)	–	–	–	145,051	3.65	+2.59%

Adapted from Wikipedia
 * Marginal parties and independent candidates omitted.
 ‡ Results for Québec solidaire are compared to the 2003 results for the Union des forces progressistes.

The end of “separatism”?

The parliamentary geometry is clear. The makeup of the National Assembly has shifted further to the right. There are now two federalist parties for voters to choose between. As Canadian Prime Minister Harper was quick to note, the results likely rule out the prospects for a new referendum on Quebec sovereignty in the near future.

But PQ losses do not necessarily translate into gains for the federalists. The ADQ is nationalist albeit not pro-independence. Its federalism is conditional. The ADQ was allied with the PQ on the yes side in the 1995 referendum. It arose out of the split in the Quebec Liberals in the early 1990s when ADQ leader Mario Dumont (then the PLQ youth leader) joined with senior party members led by Jean Allaire in support of a proposal to give Quebec exclusive jurisdiction over 22 areas of government policy, taking over many areas now assigned to the federal government under the existing Constitution.

The ADQ platform in this election highlighted its proposal for “Quebec affirmation without separating”, calling for “reopening of constitutional dialogue with the federal government and the other provinces”, the adoption of a distinct “Quebec Constitution” and Quebec citizenship, designation of Quebec as the “Autonomous State of Quebec”, defence of “our areas of jurisdiction” and strengthening Quebec’s “financial autonomy”. Quebecers must overcome their “minority complex”, the party said.

The legislative agenda of Charest’s Liberals is now dependent on the votes of either the autonomist ADQ or the sovereigntist PQ. And ADQ leader Dumont has expressed the hope “that we could rally some kind of unanimity at the National Assembly around an autonomist vision.”

Harper sought to shore up the Quebec Liberals and defuse demands for constitutional change through shoveling money to Quebec in the federal budget just a week before the election — “the mother of all sponsorship campaigns”, wrote one wag. But will tactics like this satisfy those favouring more substantial changes in Quebec’s relationship to Canada? They are a majority in Quebec. During the election campaign, polls registered popular support for sovereignty at well over 40% with or without a formal association with Canada. Evidently, the ADQ tapped into some of that sentiment.

The fact is that the ADQ proposals, whatever their specifics (and they are vague) are likely non-starters in the rest of Canada. It is one thing to pay lip service to recognition of Quebec, or the Québécois, as a “nation” as the federal Parliament did in November. It is quite another thing to give that notion some substance through real constitutional reform. Any serious proposals to alter the framework of federalism will most probably encounter a cold reception from the Canadian political establishment, including the NDP leadership.

The likely prospect, then, is for renewed confrontations with Ottawa in Quebec’s ongoing quest for national affirmation and self-determination.

Labour, social movements in retreat

With three more-or-less neoliberal parties dominating politics and media attention, there is a danger that too much will be read into the shifts in voter preference, especially when the re-allocation of parliamentary seats exaggerates the actual change in the popular vote.

The ADQ's gains were largely at the expense of the Liberals. The ADQ platform sounded most of the social themes so dear to right-wing ideologues: family allowances in place of state-subsidized childcare, school autonomy and job-oriented curricula, an increased role for private healthcare, tougher law and order, lower taxes, etc. But in most respects, this program does not differ qualitatively from Charest's agenda. Québec solidaire leaders Françoise David and Amir Khadir were probably correct to state, in a post-election news release, that the PLQ and ADQ "will be as thick as thieves when it comes to privatizing health care, increasing student fees, refusing to index social assistance and imposing [worse] working conditions on public sector workers."

In fact, public disaffection with the Liberals was generally attributed to precisely this policy direction, which the Charest government had been pursuing since its election in 2003 in defiance of mass opposition.

In their first year in office, the Liberals unveiled legislation dismantling healthcare unions, restricting and even denying bargaining rights to many public sector workers, increasing contracting out to non-union employers and removing minimum wage standards in some industries. This legislation was rammed through the National Assembly in the face of massive protests by workers throughout Quebec — the largest union mobilizations since the general strike that swept the province in 1972.

On May Day, 2004, 100,000 workers marched in Montréal, many of them demanding a general strike to defeat the government offensive. The union leaderships worked to cool the growing confrontation, however, frustrating and ultimately demoralizing many militants.

In December 2005, faced with escalating strikes and rallies by a union common front of half a million public sector workers who had been without a contract since June 2003, the Charest government successfully imposed a takeback contract to run to 2010, with stiff fines for any further strike action. These and other antilabor moves were accompanied during Charest's term in office by substantial cuts in childcare funding, higher fees for publicly funded daycare and threats to remove a freeze on post-secondary tuition fees. In 2005, students struck colleges and universities and marched in tens of thousands in the largest such actions in Quebec history.

However, these powerful mobilizations by workers, students and others were unable to defeat the Liberals' assault, although they did force some retreats on the government. A major obstacle facing the government's opponents was their lack of a political alternative. The Parti québécois offered at best tepid opposition to Charest's agenda and the new PQ leader André Boisclair refused to commit to re-opening public sector contracts or repealing much of the Liberals' anti-union legislation. The last year saw a sharp decline in mass actions while PQ support slowly declined in opinion polls.

With no major party presenting any perspective for reversing these setbacks, Quebec's political discourse became increasingly dominated by symbolic issues that fed on insecurities over national self-definition and identity. The ADQ proved particularly adept at exploiting this trend.

ADQ works the “identity” theme

Until recently, the ADQ's electoral base was in Quebec's largely rural hinterland. But its support increased dramatically when ADQ leader Mario Dumont began attacking policies to accommodate the right of religious minorities, mainly Muslims, to express or practice their faith in public (for example, dress codes allowing hijabs or kirpans in the public schools, or the provision of prayer space for Muslims in unoccupied classrooms). Most of the incidents around which these issues arose have occurred in Montréal, but the ADQ's reactionary claim that “reasonable accommodation” of such practices challenged Québécois identity seemed to have its greatest resonance outside the metropolis. The ADQ appears to have tapped into some deep-seated discomfort among many Québécois, to whom cosmopolitan, multiracial and socially tolerant Montréal seems alien to their perception of Quebec culture and sense of personal security.

The ADQ's opposition to religious minority practices meant that it campaigned in favour of “secularism” — in sharp contrast to the staunchly Catholic right-wing forces of the past such as Maurice Duplessis' Union Nationale or Réal Caouette's *Créditistes*. This opened the way to support from urbanites for whom religion plays little or no role in their sense of national identity.

Although the ADQ exploited these largely symbolic issues to its advantage, all parties have in fact played on fears of minority contamination of Quebec values. One of the first manifestations of such concerns came in the form of a joint Liberal-PQ motion, adopted unanimously in the National Assembly in 2005, condemning a proposal (in Ontario!) to extend legal recognition of private arbitration of family law disputes to Moslems — even though Quebec's Civil Code already bars such private arbitration. (See *Socialist Voice* #78) And during this election campaign it was PQ leader André Boisclair who insisted that women with burkas would have to unveil in order to vote!

Has PQ forgotten its *raison d'être*?

Issues of national identity have featured prominently in post-election commentary by sovereigntists as they assess the PQ's electoral debacle. The party's left-wing “club” of trade-unionists and progressives, SPQ-Libre, attributed the cultural insecurity it sees in Quebec primarily to capitalist globalization and its devastating impact on the province's regional economy and social structure. It said the PQ's response to the ADQ “identity” campaign should have emphasized “the defence and promotion of the French language and culture”, issues “at the heart of the Quebec national movement”.

Others echoed this theme. Jean Dorion, president of the nationalist Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society, says the PQ is the party that talked least about language during the campaign. When in

government, it failed to implement legislation adopted in 2003 that proclaimed French the sole language of government communications.

“Dumont roused consciousness of identity in a very unhealthy way,” says Dorion. This distracted people from some really important questions “such as the bilingualism in our society and the hegemony of English”. He cites the fact that half the new megahospital infrastructures being built in Montréal will be administered in English.

Pierre Renaud, a former leader of the RIN, the PQ’s independentist predecessor, argues that the PQ has focused too exclusively on its promised referendum on sovereignty. “Instead, we have to talk to them about the reasons for achieving independence. It was never for reasons of money, but we kept talking about how profitable it would be. That was a mistake. We want to form a country for issues of culture, language, pride, identity, history, etc.”

Former PQ minister Yves Duhaime agrees. “We just talked about the referendum, we didn’t talk about sovereignty.... Yes, we have to put the figures on the table, but achieving sovereignty is not an accounting exercise, especially when Mr. Charest himself said Quebec had the means to do it.”

Historian Éric Bédard, who headed the PQ youth organization at the time of the 1995 referendum, says Boisclair left the issue of Quebec identity to the ADQ. He draws an interesting historical parallel: in 1969, the Union Nationale lost the election after it had enacted “free choice” of language in education (Bill 63). Similarly, he says, the PQ’s pro-sovereignty views have become “denationalized”.

French language still under pressure

In fact, the question of French language rights continues to be front and centre in the consciousness of many Quebec working people. Just days after the March 26 general election, the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) held a major symposium on Quebec’s stalled language law reforms and the ongoing problem of anglicization of business and industry in the province. The FTQ released studies showing that about one out of every two Francophones working in both languages in the private sector must communicate primarily in English with Anglophone superiors, colleagues and subordinates.

Former PQ cabinet minister Louise Beaudoin, a featured speaker, said it was unacceptable that 30 years after the enactment of Law 101, the Charter of the French Language, language transfers in Quebec were still predominantly toward English; given the option, immigrants, Anglophones and even some Francophones tend to choose English instead of French as their language of choice. A major problem, she said, is that “there is still no real francization program in firms with fewer than 50 employees”, where most immigrant workers are concentrated.

And Beaudoin was scathing in her criticism of PQ leader André Boisclair for not raising the issue of language and culture in the election campaign. “How is it,” she asked, “that in a two-

hour debate of the party leaders, in which all the major issues in Quebec society should be aired, not a word was said about the French language and Quebec culture?”

The FTQ had motivated its endorsement of the PQ in the election on the basis of the party’s formal commitment, in its published platform, to “promoting identity, language and culture”, promoting the right to “work in French” and “achieving the sovereignty of Quebec”. At the same time, the FTQ criticized the party’s demand for a new referendum on sovereignty and Boisclair’s recent call to end the “copinage” (cronyism) between the PQ and the unions.

A new sovereigntist coalition?

Interviewed by *Le Devoir* on his reaction to the election results, Gérald Larose, a former leader of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) and now chair of the Conseil de la souveraineté, the umbrella council of pro-sovereignty organizations, noted that the PQ could no longer be said to monopolize the sovereignty movement. He called for creating a “new sovereigntist coalition”, much broader than the PQ and its supporters.

But to be successful, many argue, Quebec sovereignty must be linked to a progressive “projet de société”, a social agenda that holds out the promise and hope of a “new and different Quebec” that can do away with social inequality and poverty. The PQ’s inability to promise that social change, starkly evident after its record in government, means that it cannot provide adequate leadership for this projected coalition.

The nationalist movement is continuing to suffer the effects of its political hegemony by the PQ, which held office for 18 years between 1976 and 2003, many of them years of neoliberal austerity, “zero deficits” and cutbacks in social programs. Part of the legacy as well are the two failed referendums on sovereignty-association (1980 and 1995), the 1982 unilateral federal patriation of the Constitution, etc., the defeat of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown rounds of constitutional negotiation and reform, etc.

Offsetting these setbacks, of course, were the major reforms enacted by both PQ and Liberal governments since 1960 under the pressure of powerful and sustained labour and nationalist struggles over several decades. These reforms greatly enhanced the status of the French language and of Francophones in Quebec, modernized its education system and established social welfare programs that to some degree reduced economic and social disparities with the rest of Canada including Ontario, the province with a comparable industrial development. Quebec’s relative success in these areas may have undermined to some degree the sense of urgency behind the sovereigntist movement.

Increasing class stratification

These reforms have also increased the stratification of Quebec society, with the growth in recent decades of many middle layers of relatively well-off Francophone professionals and highly educated workers. The much vaunted “Quebec model” of the welfare state is less appealing to

them now; many are attracted by the lure of neoliberal individualism. The ADQ's electoral inroads in urban and especially suburban areas of Quebec may reflect these sociological changes.

Issues of language and culture are still important to these layers, but they are less inclined to see solutions to their insecurities in meta changes, including constitutional reforms. However, they may want more than what Charest's milquetoast brand of pragmatic cooperative federalism was able to yield (which was not much). In any event, nationalist consciousness has not been immune to the overall context of defeats and relative demobilization of the unions and social movements. In a political landscape dominated by neoliberal parties, allegiances were easily shifted among three parties distinguished by little more than their respective positions on the national question.

For almost five decades, class politics in Quebec have unfolded in a predominantly nationalist framework in which the contending social forces have operated within a broad consensus on the need to promote French-language rights and Francophone identity whether within or without the Confederation. That consensus remains, but new issues of identity, arising mainly around the challenges of integrating immigrants and non-Francophones within Quebec society, intersect with initial signs of a growing class differentiation within the broad nationalist movement. The PQ's rightward shift has opened space to the left for sections of the workers and social movements to begin to break from bourgeois nationalism. The formation of Québec solidaire reflects this, although still incompletely and not altogether coherently.

Likewise, the open rifts within the PQ will favour a renewed debate in Quebec over the road ahead for the social movements, including the trade unions whose members have long been the bedrock of support for that party.

This, and not the overnight ascension of the ADQ, may well turn out to be the most important result of the 2007 election. Historically, national and class mobilizations in Quebec, while not in lockstep, have tracked each other closely. New battles lie ahead, opening new prospects for beginning to build a broad working-class political alternative to capitalist exploitation and national oppression.

Despite Low Vote, Québec Solidaire Registers Important Gains

The Québec solidaire score of 3.65% will no doubt be disappointing to many QS members and supporters, not least because the party failed to outpoll the Greens (PVQ), who campaigned on a basically neoliberal platform but evidently capitalized on recent public concern over the environment. (The PVQ, which fielded only 37 candidates in 2003, managed to run in 108 ridings this time, although the party claims a membership of only 1,000.)

QS had hoped to break through a psychological barrier of 5% and thereby strengthen its case for representation in the National Assembly under a still-to-be-defined forthcoming electoral reform based on proportional representation.

Nevertheless, the campaign marked some major advances for the fledgling party formed just a year ago through the fusion of Option citoyenne with the Union des forces progressistes (UFP).

QS ran in all but two of Quebec's 125 ridings. More than half of its candidates (64) were women — a first for a Quebec political party. In each riding, the party had to collect at least 100 signatures of voters for its candidates to be listed on the ballot. This entailed an intensive canvassing effort, and by the end of the campaign the party membership had increased by more than 1,000 to over 6,500.

The QS score was much above its average in a number of ridings where the party waged “priority” or “intermediate” rather than “visibility” campaigns. In Montréal's Mercier and Gouin ridings, where QS co-leaders Amir Khadir and Françoise David ran, the party came second behind the PQ, with scores of over 29% and 26% respectively. In a dozen other ridings, five of them outside of Montréal, the party got more than 5% of the popular vote. Further details: <http://www.monvote.qc.ca/en/resultatsSommaire.asp>

Generally, the candidates with the higher scores are well-known activists and leaders in various social movements, the women's movement and the unions.

The Montréal Central Council of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) urged its 125,000 members to vote for Québec solidaire — the first time ever that a major labour body had voted to endorse a party to the left of the PQ. Party candidates were also endorsed by a number of prominent leaders in other unions, including nurses' union leader Jenny Skene and the former president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Nicole Turmel. The Montréal wing of the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) voted to support the campaigns of QS labour activists Arthur Sandborn and André Frappier.

QS campaigned in favour of going beyond the Kyoto protocol standards and was given an “excellent” rating by Greenpeace, just behind the Greens.

During the campaign, some aboriginal leaders held a conference “on Mohawk territory” and issued a joint statement on the elections denouncing the major parties for failing to address native concerns. But Ghislain Picard, the chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, singled out Québec solidaire as “the only exception”. QS candidate François Saillant addressed the Assembly on March 20 and got a warm reception when he explained the party's support for self-determination of the aboriginal peoples and respect for treaty and aboriginal rights.

A major issue during the election campaign was the media conglomerates' decision to exclude QS and the Greens from the party leaders' TV debate. A non-partisan petition to reverse that decision was signed by more than 25,000 persons, but the media firms, led by the federal government's Radio-Canada/CBC, refused to yield.

Although QS had few financial resources, it produced professional looking leaflets and signs. A 50-page campaign handbook was published for candidates and party workers on the party's intranet, along with informative briefing notes on key issues.

Many candidates held effective public meetings and street demonstrations in their ridings. Some held "soupes populaires", serving hot food along with election handbills to frigid passersby. In some ridings, candidates held local assemblies inviting input from citizens on themes and demands to include in their campaigns. Some campaign meetings attracted hundreds of enthusiastic participants; one in Montréal drew more than 700 according to media reports. QS candidates spoke at many all-candidates meetings in their ridings. For further details, see <http://www.quebecsolidaire.net/actualite-nationale>

Although shut out from the leaders' debate, the QS campaign did get some coverage in the mass media, including some editorial criticism. An article in Quebec's largest-circulation daily newspaper, *La Presse*, red-baited the party because two of its candidates are public members of the Quebec Communist party (PCQ); the PCQ is an affiliated collective within Québec solidaire.

Programmatically, the QS campaign was closely confined to the party's "25 concrete and realizable commitments" adopted at its platform convention in November 2006. Prominent campaign themes were the party's call for a \$10 minimum wage (it is currently \$7.75 an hour); construction of 4,000 new units of social housing; abolition of university fees and private schools; nationalization of wind-generated power; massive investment in public transit; and election of a constituent assembly to adopt democratically the constitution of a sovereign Quebec.

Unlike the 2003 campaign of its predecessor the UFP, the QS campaign did not mention international issues such as Canada's war in Afghanistan, although some QS candidates and supporters participated in the March 17 antiwar actions. Nor did the party express any opposition to capitalist trade and investment deals like NAFTA. The limited platform reflected a QS leadership decision made last year to confine its programmatic intervention in the election to "a limited number of proposals . . . conceived in terms of a governmental project that is immediately realizable in the present framework — that is, provincial and neoliberal."

It is clear that the Québec solidaire campaign was successful in raising the party's profile, increasing its membership and giving it valuable experience in electioneering. Whether it was equally successful in generating the political and programmatic impact it hoped to have among working people and students is a worthy topic for debate as QS members reflect on this experience in the coming months.

[Editors' Note: These articles are also scheduled for publication in a forthcoming issue of *Relay*, a publication of the Socialist Project.]

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Cairo Conference Calls for World Resistance Against Imperialism

- Part One: A New Pole of Anti-Imperialist Leadership
- Part Two: The Challenge of World Unity
- Interview with a Venezuelan Delegate

Part One

A New Pole of Anti-Imperialist Leadership

By John Riddell

[Editors' note: Because most conference participants face repressive conditions in their homelands, individual's names are omitted from this report.]

CAIRO, EGYPT — More than 1,500 activists from the Mideast and around the world met in Cairo March 29-April 1 under the banner, “Towards an International Alliance against Imperialism and Zionism.” The conference — the fifth held in Cairo since 2002 by the International Campaign against U.S. and Zionist Occupation — brought together Islamic, nationalist, and socialist forces from the region, together with delegates from anti-war coalitions in Canada, Korea, Venezuela, and many countries of Europe.

The conference revealed increased cohesion among these currents in the struggle against both imperialist aggression and the dictatorial pro-U.S. regimes in the Mideast.

The success of the Cairo conference is an encouraging sign that a new pole of international leadership in anti-imperialist struggle may be emerging in the Middle East — analogous to what we see arising in Latin America under the impulse of Venezuela and Cuba. Socialists in Canada need to strengthen their ties of solidarity with these vanguard fighters in the Middle East.

Four Steps Forward

Opening the conference, the head of a major Egyptian union commented, “This year has written the death sentence for the U.S. project in the region.” This optimism was widely shared among delegates, who drew confidence from four major setbacks to imperialism in the region during the past year:

- During last year's July war, the Lebanese revolutionary movement Hizbullah dealt a stinging setback to Israel's invasion army.
- After the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 parliamentary elections, Palestinians have successfully withstood efforts by Israel and imperialist powers (including Canada) to blockade and starve them into submission.

- The resistance movement in Iraq has held firm against the U.S. and other occupation forces. In the words of the conference declaration, it has “pushed the U.S. into a hopeless swamp.”
- In the face of intense repression, the Egyptian people repudiated dictator Hosni Mubarek’s moves to further diminish democratic rights by abstaining in his March referendum in a proportion variously estimated at 73% (the government) or 95% (independent observers). This victory coincides with a continuing wave of militant strikes and peasant resistance.

Egypt: United Resistance

For the Egyptian oppositionists who made up the majority of those present, attending the conference was an act of defiance against the country’s pro-U.S. dictatorship. “We see growing national rejection of the corrupt regime,” the conference chair told delegates. “The countdown has begun.”

The coalition of democratic forces that led the recent abstention campaign in Egypt — Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood, secular nationalists in the tradition of former president Gamal Abdul Nasser, and socialists — also joined in calling and organizing the conference. The conference debates revealed mutual respect among these currents and broad agreement on their common political course.

Among delegates from other countries, the most authoritative voices were those of Hizbullah and Hamas. The Egyptian government blocked delegates Iran and Iraq from attending, but delegations were present from a half-dozen other Mideast countries and a similar number of countries in Europe. Delegates also came from India and Venezuela.

The Canadian delegation of 20 was among the largest, but it was overshadowed by a youthful, energetic, outgoing, and extremely well organized contingent of 75 sent by the South Korean anti-war and anti-imperialist organization All Together.

The conference was organized simultaneously with the Third Cairo Social Forum, which featured discussions with worker, peasant, student, and women activists, in a large downtown union headquarters. Plenary took place alongside many panel sessions. Discussions were in Arabic, English, and, occasionally, Korean; simultaneous translation between Arabic and English was professional and effective.

For Egyptian activists, whose events are routinely banned or attacked by police, this was a rare opportunity to speak their minds freely, and the conference was imbued by their joy, optimism, and enthusiasm. Outside the crowded meeting halls, literature stands of different groups were arrayed in a foyer that was usually filled by several hundred participants in intense discussion. Again and again I was approached by young Egyptian delegates, eager to find out who I was, to talk of their experiences, and to exchange information.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The Egyptian groups utilized the conference to build defense for the 40 Muslim Brotherhood supporters now facing trial before military tribunals for their dissident views. Brotherhood members made up the majority of the younger delegates, and young women were very numerous among them.

Among the Egyptian currents, the Brotherhood is the main target of Mubarek's heightened repression, which aims to drive its 88 representatives out of parliament. The Brotherhood enjoys mass support among Egyptian working people and would be odds-on favourite to win a free election.

But the Brotherhood's proclaimed goals reach beyond forming a government. "Not a single political, religious, social, or cultural group should be excluded from Egypt's political life," the Brotherhood's jailed vice-president has written. "The objective must be to end the monopoly of government by a single party and boost popular engagement in political activity."

In the opening session, a Brotherhood central leader called on conference participants to apply this inclusive approach to resistance on a world scale. He denounced the U.S. "military-industrial complex and the capitalist elite" that profit "at the expense of the poor in America and all over the world." The conference "proves that we can reach a common agenda," he said. But "a mere meeting is not enough; we should develop our common action" as part of a "popular transnational coalition."

The conference declaration points out that in the Middle East, resistance against "U.S. and Zionist colonialism" is inseparable from the "struggle against despotism" in the Arab countries. A leader of Egypt's secular nationalist Karama Party said there is a "real axis of evil" in the Mideast region, consisting of "Egypt, Jordan, and Arabia, which promote the imperialist project." She stressed that "we must all fight against our own governments."

Inclusive Social Vision

Spokespersons of different currents stressed their inclusive vision of Mideast society. "We stand together with Christians and Jews — this was decided by Islam 1,500 years ago," said a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood of Sudan. The Egyptian Brotherhood distributed their program, which calls for partnership with the country's sizeable Christian minority and respect for their beliefs and worship. Many speakers stressed that they held no antagonism against Jewish people. "We are not against Jews but against Zionism," said an Egyptian leader of anti-Zionist work. "And there are many who are Zionists but not Jews, like George Bush and most of the Arab leaders."

Close to 150 participants crowded into a panel discussion of Jews and Zionism. Drawing on material in his new book, *The Myths of Zionism*, British socialist John Rose reviewed the historic harmony of Jewish and Muslim communities in the Middle East; an Egyptian scholar presented the views of Jewish Marxist Abram Leon (*The Jewish Question*); and Suzanne Weiss from Canada discussed the holocaust and defense of the Palestinians (see *Socialist Voice* #111).

Another crowded panel, where delegates presented their experience in combating Islamophobia, was summed up by a Canadian delegate: “It is not enough to defend civil rights; we have to defend religious freedoms. For us secularism means defending the maximum of religious freedom especially for minorities.”

Addressing a plenary session, a central leader of Hizbullah, said that “Islamic movements must apply democracy,” which he described as “the bridge to a better world in the Arab region.” The state, he insisted, must be religiously neutral. “The government may be Islamic, but society must be open to all points of view. As the Koran states, we cannot force religion on people.”

The Hizbullah leader criticized some Islamic groups who consider everyone outside — even other Islamic groups — to be the enemy. “They will therefore fail,” he said. But Hizbullah and Hamas “have no problems collaborating with the left,” he said, pointing to Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s insistence on broad popular unity. “The work against imperialism cannot be carried out by just one current.”

Nor did Islamic delegates see any iron wall between their aspirations and those of anti-capitalist movements. A delegate from the Muslim Brotherhood of Sudan, recalling his country’s Cold War-era alignment with socialist movements, added, “When the Soviet Union fell, the principles remained: freedom and equality, embraced by both socialist and religious movements.” The conference declaration cited the importance of “linking the struggle against colonialism and racism on the one hand and the struggle against capitalist globalization and new liberalism on the other.”

Part Two

The Challenge of World Unity

Delegates at this year’s Conference Against Imperialism and Zionism, held in Cairo March 29-April 1, searched for ways to express the urgency of unity between opponents of imperialism in Islamic, socialist, and antiwar movements, in East and West.

- “There is no essential difference between dictatorship in Egypt and Britain,” said a young woman from the Muslim Brotherhood. “There is no difference between the antiwar movement and women [in Iraq] who have lost their sons the war.”
- Another Brotherhood student activist said that previously, “the left thought Islam was just an anachronism, while Muslims accused the left of trying to destroy their way of life.” But that was changing, due in part to “Latin American leaders such as Hugo Chávez ... reaching out to the Muslim resistance.” (Quoted in Al-Ahram)
- Aisha, a young woman member of the Brotherhood student organization, told me, “We tend to think support [from the West] is with words only. But we are becoming more aware. European people say their beliefs change when they come here. All the West is not against us. If we cooperate we can change the world.”

- A young woman delegate from Caracas said, “We need to build in Venezuela the culture of resistance that we find at the conference here, because we face daily threats from imperialism.” Meanwhile, the Mideast peoples “need our culture of social activism.” (See *Interview with Venezuelan delegate*)

And from conference leaders:

- A leader of Hizbullah: “We went to the European Social Forum: some approved us and some refused us. Many Marxist parties refuse to work with us because they consider resistance to be terrorism.” However: “We are for unity of the weak regardless of religion, colour, ideology, language.”
- The Muslim Brotherhood: “The Islamic Movement ... condemns any attempt to make splits among the various parties of this alliance... We are proud of all our guests, specially those who came from long distances to participate.”
- A leader of the Stop the War Coalition, Britain: “Movements on the left and Islamic movements who stand for the poor can unite. But it has to be won in struggle. And on each side we have taken losses in order to make these alliances.”
- An Arab leader of the Canadian Peace Alliance: “Regardless of our differences, we have no choice but resistance, whether in arms or in demonstrations. Because when the people are united, they will never be defeated.”

Latin American Allies

The only delegate from Latin America was a Venezuelan of Mideast origin and a member of a community action collective in Caracas. Conference organizers asked her to speak in two major plenary sessions, where she was warmly received. Introducing her, the conference chair pointed to Venezuela as “the country that was more courageous than many Arab regimes” in opposing the U.S.-Zionist war against Lebanon; a country “that is talking of socialism and nationalizing while [our countries] privatize.”

In the closing session, the Hizbullah leader returned to this point: “The fighters in Venezuela are closer to us than the Arabs that agree with imperialism or that impose injustice.” And the conference declaration highlighted the task of “linking the rising movements of the left in Latin America with the antiwar movements on the one hand and the resistance movements and nationalist forces in the Arab region on the other.”

World Anti-Zionist Boycott

The election of a Hamas majority to the Palestinian parliament last year was significant, one of its central leaders said, “not because of Hamas but because the Palestinians chose a different road — not to submit.” Since then, he said, “the resistance has accomplished things that we had never done before,” including forcing Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Lebanon.

The conference drew encouragement from the recent formation of a united Palestinian cabinet, but its declaration warned against the continuing “American, Zionist, and Arab pressures to surrender” and efforts to “impose a civil war” on the Palestinians. It called for “campaigns to break the siege imposed on the people and resistance in Palestine.”

Meanwhile, as the Hizbullah leader noted, “Defeat [in Lebanon] has struck Israel like an earthquake, causing a shakeup in all levels of society. The role of the Zionist state as imperialist policeman has ebbed.”

The conference called for increased pressure through “organization of an international campaign for the boycott of Israel,” including through development of a website to coordinate the boycott worldwide.” A panel, attended by 100 participants, heard reports of such efforts in Britain, Canada, and Egypt — where an anti-Israel/U.S. boycott in recent years caused losses, by one estimate, of US\$13 billion to imperialist concerns.

Struggle for Unity in Iraq

The conference declaration paid homage to “the fierce resistance against the American occupation” of Iraq that “has pushed the U.S. administration into a hopeless swamp.” Yet the resistance is menaced by an “ugly sectarian conflict” promoted by the occupying forces. “The resistance will not be able to liberate Iraq except through ... turning the resistance into a unified national one that unites Shiites and Sunnis against the American occupant.”

In this regard, several delegates criticized the role of the Iranian government in Iraq. One Lebanese delegate called on Iran to “cut relations with the Iraqi Shiite puppets, support the resistance, and really make things tough for the Americans.”

However, a Muslim Brotherhood parliamentary representative cautioned that Iran’s interest in Iraq is “legitimate.” Iran is “a free country, taking orders from no one,” he said, while the Arab regimes “simply carry out orders from the U.S.” Still, in his view, “Iran could induce a shift toward unity in Iraq.”

A Hizbullah leader said that “we must hold the Arab leaders responsible for the religious dispute in Iraq and not blame Iran.” The conflict in Iraq is “more complicated than what has been said,” he added. “I think Iran is trying to help the resistance — that, at least, is what the U.S. is saying.

This issue was held over for further discussion.

All delegates agreed, however, on the urgent efforts to defend Iran’s right to nuclear energy and oppose U.S.-led threats against Iran. The declaration declared that “we have to join our efforts to stop this crazy war by organizing protests, demonstrations, and campaigns all over the world.”

Coordinated Actions

The conference declaration took an initial step toward structuring a year-round movement by projecting three coordinated worldwide actions:

- **July:** Protest aggression against Lebanon and demand withdrawal of UN occupation forces from that country.
- **September:** Defend the rights of the Palestinian people.
- **March:** Demand an end to the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

In addition, the declaration called for a worldwide response to any U.S. act of war against Iran through an international demonstration. It also invited all anti-imperialist and anti-globalization forces worldwide to the next Cairo conference, to be held March 27-30, 2008.

Toward Cairo 2008

The annual Cairo conference has emerged as an important vehicle to unite and coordinate forces for world anti-imperialist struggle. Its unscripted and candid debates provide a profound education about the world of Mideast resistance. The conference stands in the front ranks of efforts to bring together in common endeavour opponents of imperialism in the First and Third Worlds.

Moreover, the Cairo conference stands as an example of unity among forces in the Mideast that have been previously divided by bitter antagonism — an achievement worth emulation by progressive forces in the West.

Representation from non-Mideast countries in Cairo, while significant, needs to be broadened. Here we are up against significant barriers. To start with, progressive forces in North America and Europe are not well informed about Mideast resistance movements, and some still hold misconceptions about Islamic “fundamentalism.”

But more important, the Canadian and other governments occupying Mideast countries are intensely hostile to collaboration between their citizens and Mideast resistance forces, which in their eyes gives aid and comfort to the “enemy.” Ottawa, for example, has blacklisted Hamas and Hizbullah as a “terrorist” organizations.

The best way we can overcome these divisions is to build the antiwar, anti-occupation, and Palestinian defense movements. At the same time, we can also explain and defend the movements that lead the Cairo conferences and prepare for expanded representation at the next meeting in 2008.

A new “Baku”?

Eighty-seven years ago, the world communist movement convened a “Congress of the Peoples of the East” that united about 2,000 delegates from Mideast and Central Asian countries in Baku, capital of Soviet Azerbaijan. This historic gathering was significant above all as a step in consolidating a new, revolutionary leadership of liberation struggles in Asia.

The Cairo conference this year resembles Baku in many ways: size, geographical location, range of political currents, anti-imperialist focus, and its call for coordinated international resistance.

Above all, the Cairo conference reflects important progress in the development of anti-imperialist leadership in this decisive sector of the world.

There is a significant difference. The call for Baku was made by Marxists based in Russia and Europe, appealing to nationalists and Islamists in central and west Asia. The call for Cairo comes in reverse: from the Mideast currents to antiwar and anticapitalist forces in the West and elsewhere.

This is as it should be. It reflects the leading role now played internationally by resistance struggles in the Third World. It is now the progressive forces in the Western countries that must struggle against many obstacles, including some misconceptions and prejudices, to make their way to the event.

The following words from the call of the Communist International, announcing the Baku Congress in 1920, are thus worth heeding:

“Spare no effort to ensure that as many as possible may be present.... Make your way over mountains and rivers, through forests and deserts, to meet and discuss how to free yourselves from the chains of servitude and unite in fraternal alliance, so as to live a life based on equality, freedom, and brotherhood....

“May the congress proclaim to your enemies in Europe and America and in your own countries that the age of slavery is past, that you are rising in revolt, and that you will be victorious.”¹

Or, as a Hizbullah delegate said at the closing session in Cairo, “Through the conference the world is more beautiful, more promising — and tomorrow is for us, not for imperialism.”

[Note: The quotation from the Baku Congress is from John Riddell, ed. *To See the Dawn: Baku 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1993. P. 40. The Baku Conference proceedings are also available online.]

‘Venezuela Depends on Resistance Everywhere’ Interview with Venezuelan Delegate to Cairo Conference

By Suzanne Weiss

“I was sent here by my organization, the 13th of April Movement, because resistance in Venezuela depends on resistance elsewhere, from which we must learn,” said Venezuela’s one delegate to the Cairo Conference, a member of “Resistencia por la Paz” in Caracas.

“I am proud to be here,” she said. “We are sharing different forms of resistance. We see we in Venezuela are not alone.”

Noting the heavy police presence around the conference site, she stressed the courage of the Egyptian participants, “who know they can be jailed for coming here.”

She criticized the leftist groups, especially in Europe, who “support the popular upsurge in Latin America but not in the Mideast.” They are falling for hypocritical imperialist arguments against Islam, when its real campaign is “not against Islam but against resistance [to imperialism].”

Noting the prominence of women in the conference, the Venezuelan delegate said, “Women have an important role as protagonists here and in society as a whole.”

Machismo is found everywhere in the world, she added, flowing from capitalism’s scorn for “work that does not produce direct value.”

But in Venezuela, “women assume more responsibility than men” in the popular movement. “That will happen here too, and, indeed, it is already almost the same,” she said. She noted the balance in Hezbollah’s conference delegation: one man and one woman.

She praised the role of Hugo Chávez in encouraging women’s social involvement. “When he speaks to women, he asks, ‘What do you do in your day? Why so much time watching TV — you should get together with other women: make a bakery in your community; make your own laws. You have to learn to read, even if you’re eighty.’ ”

More Latin Americans are needed at the Cairo conference, the Venezuelan delegate said, especially from Bolivia and Venezuela. “We need to build in Venezuela the culture of resistance that we find at the conference here, because we face daily threats from imperialism.” While the Mideast peoples “need our culture of social activism.”

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The "Indian Problem" in Peru: From Mariátegui to Today

Introduction by Phil Stewart Cournoyer

This article was first published in Spanish in the magazine *Sin Permiso* on March 4 this year. *Sin Permiso* is a Spanish-language quarterly socialist magazine and a monthly e-zine published by a multinational editorial team. The article was translated for Socialist Voice by Federico Fuentes.

Hugo Blanco was a leader of the peasant uprising in the Cuzco region of Peru in the early 1960s. His book about the struggle, *Land or Death*, was published in English by Pathfinder Press in 1972. This mass upsurge, which led to armed clashes with the repressive forces of the regime, eventually led to vast changes in the Peruvian countryside, including an extensive agrarian reform. Here Blanco recounts the story of how the indigenous movement brought about the destruction of the brutal, semi-feudal system of landholding and exploitation of the indigenous population known as *Gamonalismo*.

The Peruvian socialist leader José Carlos Mariátegui was the first to offer a Marxist appreciation of Gamonalismo and of the vital role the indigenous people had to play in the struggle for national liberation in Latin America. In his 1928 book *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* Mariátegui dedicated a chapter to this question, titled "The Problems of the Indian," from which Blanco also takes the title of his article. Mariátegui wrote:

"The term Gamonalismo designates more than just a social and economic category: that of the latifundistas or large landowners. It signifies a whole phenomenon. Gamonalismo is represented not only by the gamonales but by a long hierarchy of officials, intermediaries, agents, parasites, et cetera. The literate Indian who enters the service of Gamonalismo turns into an exploiter of his own race. The central factor of the phenomenon is the hegemony of the semi-feudal landed estate in the policy and mechanism of the government. Therefore, it is this factor that should be acted upon if the evil is to be attacked at its roots and not merely observed in its temporary or subsidiary manifestations."

Following the military suppression of the Cuzco upsurge, Blanco was imprisoned and tortured. Only a massive international defence campaign, which won the support of such outstanding figures as Ernesto Che Guevara, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean Paul Sartre, saved his life. He was forced into exile, spending time in Mexico and Chile. Fleeing from the Pinochet coup in Chile, Blanco then found exile in Sweden. During that second exile Canadian socialists, who had played a significant role in the international defence campaign of the sixties, organized a successful cross-Canada speaking tour for Blanco in 1976.

Upon his return to Peru Blanco was elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1978 and later to the National Parliament under the banner of the United Left movement.

Hugo Blanco remains today an outstanding voice of the campesino and indigenous movements in Peru, and is a leader of the Federation of Campesinos of Cuzco. He is a member of the editorial board of *Sin Permiso*.

Blanco's most recent writings have stressed the strategic importance of the rise of indigenous consciousness and militancy to the mounting anti-imperialist struggles in the hemisphere – a question that is poorly understood on the international left.

In a September 2006 article “Progress of the indigenous movement against the system,” also published in *Sin Permiso*, Blanco explained that “[t]he indigenous movement is in the vanguard, not in the sweeping sense that it must guide the rest of the oppressed people (each social sector will be its own guide, each of them forging its own leadership through its own struggles); it is the vanguard in the narrow sense that it is the most advanced sector in the struggle against the system and in the building of an alternative organization for society. Against neoliberal individualism, the collectivism of the ‘ayllu’” [the indigenous communal form of social and economic organization].

In other articles Blanco has also stressed the critical role of the victory of Evo Morales in Bolivia and the rise of indigenous struggles in Ecuador.

The “Indian Problem” in Peru: From Mariátegui to Today

by Hugo Blanco

March 4, 2007

I was invited last month by a heroic community to the commemoration of a massacre of campesinos [peasants] who were fighting for land, and who, at the cost of their blood, were able to pass it on to those that work it. The recreation of the massacre was very moving.

I recalled the phrase that was stuck in the mind of Mariátegui: “The problem of the Indian is the problem of land.”

That was the terrible truth. Now it no longer is so.

Before the Invasion

Before the European invasion, across the entire continent of Abya Yala (America), individual ownership of land did not exist. The people lived on it collectively.

Unlike in Europe, the development of agriculture and cattle grazing in America did not lead to the emergence of slavery; instead primitive collectivism gave way to other forms of collectivism as privileged layers and privileged people arose. Some forms of slavery may have existed for domestic work, but agricultural production was not based on slavery as it was in Greece or Rome. Rather it was based on collective organization, called by different names in the various cultures (*ayllu* en Quechua, *calpulli* en Nahuatl).

Imported Latifundio

The European invasion led to the imposition of semi-feudal servitude. The land was stolen from indigenous communities, and the new owners allowed the serfs to use small parcels of land, who had to pay for that concession by working a few days a week on the best land — on the “property” of the *latifundista* [large landowner], and for his benefit.

This was the central feature of servitude, but more was involved. The indigenous people also had to “pay” with cattle for feeding on the natural grass that “pertained” to the property. The landowner’s cattle was looked after by indigenous people – in return, as “payment,” they received the right to pasture a few head of cattle of their own. The campesinos were arbitrarily sent to go by foot through rain and wind for days, to haul loads of products from the “hacienda” to the cities and returning with urban products for the hacienda. *Pongueaje* and *semanería* were terms for the forms of domestic service that campesinos had to carry out in the house of the owner.

There were many other obligations, made up according to the imagination of the master. He was the judge, he owned the jails, he arrested whomever he pleased, he physically mistreated someone whenever he felt like it (Bartolomé Paz, a landowner, branded the backside of an indigenous person with hot iron.) Murders were committed with impunity, and so on.

In Peru, the revolution for independence broke the chains of direct political domination by Europe, but economic dependence was maintained, to the benefit of foreign interests, firstly European and then later Yankee. The *latifundio* (large estate) system also continued with the implicit suppression of indigenous peoples and the descendants of African slaves.

That oppressive *latifundio* system, and all the servility it brought with it, began to collapse with the insurgency of the La Convención movement of the 1960s. The indigenous peoples of this country who lived through those times did not struggle in vain; even today, in spite of the many forms of oppression that they still suffer, they can say, “Now we are free!”

End of the Hacienda

The high prices obtained for exportable products from the semi-tropical zone of Cuzco gave an incentive to the *gamonalismo serrano* [the ruthless landlord system of the mountain areas] to usurp the land from the communities in the Amazon region. Because the people from the Amazon area refused to be forced into servitude, the landlords moved in campesinos from the mountain areas, who were used to such treatment.

The system of oppression was the same as that in the mountains; but it was exercised in a more forceful manner — in this area the “law,” that provided some slight protection in the mountain areas, did not exist.

The immigrant campesinos suffered due to the climate, illnesses, and unfamiliar food. Large numbers died due to malaria. Work was hard, because they first had to clear the forest before they could start their plantations. Unlike products from the mountain areas, their crops — cocoa, coffee, coca, tea, fruit-bearing trees — could only be harvested once a year.

The greedy landowners demanded ever more workdays per month, while the campesinos who needed time to cultivate their own products in order to earn any money, sought to reduce the days spent working for the landowners.

In the mountain areas, centuries of exploitation gave the system some protection of custom, but they were challenged on the edge of the jungle areas where this form of exploitation was new. Unions, organized by the Federation of Workers of Cuzco, demanded a reduction in the obligations of campesinos to their bosses. They used lawyers to present their claims.

There was some push and shove between landowners and campesinos, some pacts were signed in which the landowners ceded a bit.

But not all the landowners accepted the agreements. The most ferocious would say: "Who came up with this crazy idea that I should discuss with my Indians how they will serve me? I am going to boot out the ringleaders and put them in jail!" And that is what they did, using their close ties with the judicial power, the political power, the police, and the media.

The multiplication of unions strengthened the campesinos. By mobilizing they were able to impede "legal" evictions and get their *compañeros* [comrades] out of jail. When there was no discussion on the list of demands, the campesinos initiated strikes demanding an agreement. The strikes consisted off not working for the landowners and working on their own parcel of land instead. In that way the campesinos did not suffer as a result of the strikes, as workers or employees do, but rather enjoyed it.

In 1962, after 9 months on strike, we unanimously decided in an assembly of unions from Chaupimayo that, since the owner did not want to discuss with us, we would drop our demand for negotiations. On that day, the strike ended and became an "Agrarian Reform." We decided we would never return to working for the owners, since they had no right to the land — they had not come carrying the land on their shoulders.

The strikes extended across more than 100 haciendas which, though not as explicitly as in Chaupimayo, but rather in an implicit form, produced an agrarian reform in the valleys of La Convención and Lares, carried out by the campesinos themselves.

The landowners went around armed, threatening the campesinos. When the campesinos complained to the police, they responded: "What do you shameless Indians want? You are robbing land from the owner and he has the right to shoot you like dogs!" So the campesinos had to organize themselves into self-defense groups and they selected me to set them up. Afterwards, the government of the landowners ordered repression against us. They persecuted me. They prohibited the assemblies of the federation. And they began to carry out acts of aggression against campesinos, including the gunning down of an 11-year old child by a landowner. An assembly of four unions ordered me to lead an armed group to bring the landowner to account. Along the way we could not avoid an armed confrontation with the police, where a police officer fell. Later two more fell in another clash. The police massacred unarmed campesinos. After a few months our group was dispersed and its members captured.

Nevertheless, the armed resistance alarmed those in the military that were in the government. They thought: “If these Indians have resisted the commencement of the repression with arms, this zone will burn when we try to oblige them to return to work for the landowners, which they haven’t done for a number of months. It would be preferable to legally recognize what the Indians have done, and thereby pacify the zone”.

And that is how the law of Agrarian Reform for La Convención and Lares came into being in 1962.

It is true that this helped bring calm to the area, but it lit up the rest of the country, because the campesinos from other zones said: “Is it because we have not taken up arms that they have not given us land?”

Land occupations were initiated in the mountains, including in the department of Lima. The president of the landowners, Belaúnde, responded with massacres like that of Solterapampa, which I mentioned at the start. Those in the military remained worried that the obsolete semi-feudal haciendas would provoke an expansion of the movement. Given the experience that they had in La Convención, they decided to take power and expand to the whole country what they did in that zone. In 1968, Velasco Alvarado took power and extended the Agrarian Reform at a national level. The official lack of respect towards the indigenous community appalled the campesinos, but the *latifundio*, the feudal landed-estate system imported from Europe, was buried.

Now

That is how the axis of the indigenous problem moved away from being a problem of land. Oppression continued, but in other diverse aspects, which were derived from the land problem.

The indigenous struggle continued and continues combating all forms of oppression and achieving advances:

- Education: In the era of the *latifundio* the indigenous population did not have a right to education, despite what the law said. In the midst of the struggle against the *latifundio*, schools with teachers paid collectively by the campesinos of an area who also constructed the schools, began to appear. (The landowner Romainville kidnapped a teacher and took her as a cook. The landowner Marques ordered the destruction of a school whilst students were still inside; the children fled frightened). After the victory over the *latifundio* came the struggle that won the right to have schools paid for by the state, and secondary education was implemented. Now there exist professionals who are children of indigenous campesinos.
- Healthcare: In this aspect as well, the indigenous campesino sector created sanitary posts with their own resources, and later managed to get the state to maintain them.
- The illiterate did not have the right to vote; now they do.

- Municipalities: In the era of *gamonalismo*, it was unimaginable that there could be an indigenous campesino mayor. Now there are a number of municipalities governed by them, some more democratic than others.
- There are indigenous people in parliament.
- Public order and justice: in many places there has been a partial substitution of the judicial power and corrupt police by organized campesinos.
- There is a permanent struggle against corrupt authorities.

Probably the most important struggle today is against contamination from mining.

Neoliberalism attacks campesino products through low prices. There is a resurgence of huge landed estates, no longer in a semi-feudal form, but rather capitalist, with paid workers. The struggle encompasses all aspects of indigenous oppression: social organization, language, medicine, music, customs, native foods, coca etc.

History, seen with the hindsight of decades, shows us that with the breakdown of the system of semi-feudal servitude denounced by Mariátegui, the floodgates were opened for the indigenous struggle across all fields.

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Towards an International Alliance Against Imperialism and Zionism

Declaration of the International Campaign against U.S. and Zionist Occupation, 5th Cairo Conference (March 29-April 1, 2007)

The fifth Cairo conference is held at a time that is full of potential, but also full of challenges. The war launched by the Zionist military artillery against Lebanon with the support of the U.S. and Europe ended with an unprecedented defeat of the Zionist entity by the hands of the heroic resistance of Hezbollah. However, the battle is not over yet and the siege, which the Zionists and the U.S. administration are trying to impose on the Lebanese resistance with the help of their local agents and their use of the weapon of sectarianism after failure of their planes and tanks, means that we are facing major challenges that call upon all of us for the highest level of resistance and conscious struggle against sectarianism.

In Iraq, the fierce resistance against the American occupation has pushed the U.S. administration into a hopeless swamp. There, too, the occupation is using its final card by trying to turn the battle against the occupation into an ugly sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites. The resistance will not be able to liberate Iraq except through failing the trap of sectarianism and turning the resistance into a unified national one, that unites Shiites and Sunnis against the American occupant.

And in Palestine, where the resistance, under the leadership of Hamas, has survived the siege of starvation, without giving up to the American, Zionist, and Arab pressures to surrender to the Zionist entity and the Oslo agreements, there too the enemy and its local agents have tried to impose a civil war in order to deviate the resistance from its path and spill Palestinian blood by Palestinian hands. Despite recent agreements and despite the awareness of the resistance to stand up to those attempts, still the challenge facing the resistance is a major one. The lifting of the siege calls for a revival of the Intifada and the weapon of resistance.

Today we also witness the escalation of military threats against Iran and the widespread mobilization by the American administration to launch a fierce air strike against Iran. It is obvious that the deeper the losses of the U.S. administration in Iraq, the more the talk about the Iranian danger and the need to face it. As usual the “moderate” Arab regimes play their role in this agenda, both on the logistic military level and on the level of a media campaign that targets the isolation of the Iranian regime.

A crazy war launched by Bush against Iran will lead to the fall of hundreds of thousands of victims and the region, and probably the whole world, will enter a long period of unprecedented wars and tensions. We have to join our efforts to stop this crazy war by organizing protests, demonstrations and campaigns all over the world.

While imperialism and its allies are using sectarianisms as a weapon to split and weaken the resistance, European and U.S. governments are using the weapons of racism and Islamophobia as a weapon to justify their colonial aggression and the division of the antiwar movements. It is therefore that the struggle against anti-Moslem racism is an integral part of our struggle against war.

In Arab countries, it is no longer possible to separate the struggle against despotism from the struggle against war and the U.S. and Zionist colonialism in the region. Regimes allied to imperialism, especially the Egyptian, Saudi, and Jordanian regimes, are playing a crucial role in attempting to strangle and besiege the Palestinian, Lebanese, and Iraqi resistance in exchange for the U.S. support for their despotism. It is therefore that any action taken in Arab countries for freedom and justice should be considered an asset to armed resistance; and every victory achieved by the resistance is at the same time an earthquake that shatters the thrones of despotism and corruption in our region.

Also, it is no longer possible to separate between the starvation and impoverishment policies imposed by those regimes on the Arab peoples in the name of capitalist globalization and neoliberalism on the one hand and the regional role played by those regimes on the other. The same regimes that open their territories and waters and airspace for the colonial U.S. army are the same ones that impose economic policies that serve nobody but the giant multinational companies and a small group of local, corrupt businessmen. The price is paid by the majority of the people.

We are facing major challenges. We hope that our conference would constitute a qualitative step forwards on our path to unite efforts between the resistance movements and the national Arab opposition movement, including Islamists, socialists, Arab nationalists and the global antiwar movement.

Facing all those challenges the 5th Cairo conference has concluded with the following recommendations:

I. Supporting the resistance in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon

1- Iraq

A- Linking the antiwar struggle in occupying countries (U.S., UK, etc.) and occupation supporting countries (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia) and strengthening the pressure on those governments with the aim to:

- Closing military bases.
- Ending logistic support to U.S. forces.
- Closure of ground, naval and aviation passages to U.S. forces.
- Call for the formation of a unified national front against occupation and sectarianism.

- Strengthening the call for impeachment of the puppet Iraqi government (closure of embassies, banning visits, demonstrations against visits by Iraqi officials).
- Call for stopping all forms of collaboration in training of Iraqi military and police under occupation.
- Organization of humanitarian aid (food, medicines, etc.) to Iraqi people inside and outside Iraq (Organization of ongoing solidarity missions).

B- Organization of an annual demonstration in March against U.S. occupation of Iraq.

2- Palestine

- Revival of and networking between movements against the wall of racial discrimination.
- Organization of campaigns to break the siege imposed on the people and resistance in Palestine.
- Organization of demonstrations worldwide against visits by Zionist officials (Bush, Cheney).
- Strengthening and linking boycott movements in Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Gulf).
- Organization of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.
- Development of a website of Boycott of Zionist entity, in both Arabic and English languages to introduce and link between committees and organizations working on boycott worldwide.
- **Organization of an international campaign for the boycott of Israel and organization of an annual demonstration in September in support of the rights of the Palestinian people.**

3- Lebanon

- Considering the UN forces in Lebanon as occupation forces and supporting popular movements in the respective countries to withdraw those troops.
- Exposure and isolation of Lebanese forces in alliance with the U.S. and Israel and the role of Arab regimes in supporting them.
- Joint preparation for strengthening of widest popular movements in case of a new Zionist attack on Lebanon aiming to destroy the resistance.
- Supporting the Lebanese resistance against the U.S.-Zionist project.
- Organization of an annual international demonstration in July against the aggression against Lebanon.

II. Facing the war threats because of nuclear energy (Iran – Korea)

- Uniting positions and efforts against a U.S. attack on Iran, and organization of campaigns against ongoing escalation and siege imposed on Iran. In the case of U.S. war against Iran organization of an international demonstration against this aggression.
- Nuclear disarmament of Israel
- Supporting the right of peoples to own nuclear technology for peaceful use.
- Exposure of double standards in addressing the nuclear issue (Israel vis-à-vis Iran and Korea).

III. Building bridges between the Left and Islamic movements against Imperialism and Globalization

- Widening and deepening of collaboration between Islamic resistance movements and the struggles of the Left in the Arab region and internationally (Studying the different experiences in Lebanon, Egypt, Europe, etc.)
- Political advocacy against all forms of racial discrimination against Arab and Moslem minorities in the West and linking that discrimination to the imperialist agenda.
- Linking the struggle against colonialism and racism on the one hand and the struggle against capitalist globalization and new liberalism on the other. Challenging the notion of clash of civilizations or religions etc.
- Linking the rising movements of the left in Latin America with the antiwar movements on the one hand and the resistance movements and nationalist forces in the Arab region on the other.
- Call for the organization of a conference that joins the forces of Arab Left and the Islamic resistance movements in the Arab region to coordinate efforts of their national and democratic struggles.

IV. Concerning divisions among resistance movements

- Coordination of efforts against the diversion of Iraqi resistance towards a sectarian civil war and exposure of the attempts by U.S. occupation and Arab regimes to feed sectarian conflicts.
- Supporting national unity in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq without compromising the essential basics of resistance. (Rejecting the use of the slogan of national unity to facilitate the U.S.-Zionist agendas).
- Rejection of the use of national unity in favor of U.S. and Zionist agendas.
- Supporting and strengthening the unity of resistance (Sunni Hamas and Shiite Hezbollah against a united imperial project) and organization of worldwide activities to strengthen this unity and call for a joint conference to face sectarian divisions.

V. Building an international alliance of resistance

- Developing strategies of continuous coordination between antiwar and resistance movements in the Arab region and Latin America.
- Establishing a network for exchange of experience and information and coordination of activities.
- Agreement on international days of protest along the lines of the 15th of February 2003.

VI. Supporting the Democratic Struggles of Arab Peoples

- Supporting the struggle against freedom restricting laws under the pretext of fighting terrorism, exposing their racist and despotic nature and linking the despotism of international regimes and the struggle for democracy in the Arab region (Gunatanamo, Abu Ghreib, Egyptian and Saudi prisons, and secret detention centers in Europe).
- Linking the rising social movements (workers and professional) in the Arab region and their counterparts in the different parts of the world and creation of mechanisms for solidarity and joint struggle.
- Exposing the dictatorial Arab regimes and organization of sit ins and demonstrations against visits by symbols of despotic regimes.
- Strengthening international solidarity with democratic movements against dictatorship in the Arab region (Organization of demonstrations against military tribunals, detentions, torture) and exposure of the oppressive regimes and the U.S. and European complicity, and organization of an international campaign against referral of civilians to military courts in Egypt.

The Cairo conference organizing committee invites all groups, public figures, popular committees and civil society organizations struggling against Imperialism, Zionism, War and globalization in Egypt, the Arab world and worldwide to the Cairo social forum to be held between the 27th and 30th of March 2008.

The Egyptian organizing committee will form an Egyptian and international coordinating committee to prepare for the event.

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Why the Antiwar Movement Must Defend Iran

by Faline Bobier

Faline Bobier is a leading member of the International Socialists and a frequent writer for Socialist Worker. This article is abridged from a talk she gave to an IS forum in Toronto on April 10.

It's been clear for at least a year and longer — remember Bush's famous speech where he first used the term "axis of evil" in his State of the Union address in January 2002, where he targeted Syria, North Korea and Iran — that Bush and his cabal have Iran and "regime change" in their sights.

Seymour Hersh, in two interesting articles in the *New Yorker* magazine in April 2006 and March of this year, paints a scary picture of just how much Iran is in the sights of the neocons in the White House — even more so since Bush's strategy has been shown to be a complete failure in Iraq. He wrote, for example:

"This is much more than a nuclear issue,' one high-ranking diplomat told me in Vienna. 'That's just a rallying point, and there is still time to fix it. But the Administration believes it cannot be fixed unless they control the hearts and minds of Iran. The real issue is who is going to control the Middle East and its oil in the next ten years.' "

The rhetoric that Bush and others have been using to ratchet up the call to war has been based on the so-called threat of Iran building its capacity for nuclear weapons and how dangerous it will be for a "terrorist" regime to have nuclear weapons.

But the charges, from all evidence that we can see, are false and are being used to try and create the same kind of "consensus" based on lies that we saw in the lead-up to the war on Iraq.

The countries that actually have nuclear weapons are the U.S. and Britain and their friends. Both India and Pakistan have developed their nuclear weapons secretly and in defiance of the treaty. The Pakistani military dictatorship has exported its nuclear technology. And Israel has between 200 and 500 thermonuclear weapons targeted at Iran and other Middle Eastern states.

Indeed, the bellicose posturing of the U.S. may push the Iranian government toward developing nuclear weapons capacity. One of Israel's leading military historians, Martin van Creveld, wrote recently: "Obviously, we don't want Iran to have nuclear weapons and I don't know if they're developing them, but if they're not developing them, they're crazy."

The recent capture of 15 Royal Navy personnel by Iran was used to ratchet up the threats against the country. The U.S. sent two aircraft carriers to the Persian Gulf, with a third battle group on its way last week. All three are nuclear armed.

The whipped-up "hostage crisis" led some pro-war voices to call more loudly for intervention in Iran, particularly after the British sailors and marines were returned to Britain.

War drums being beaten

We can't let ourselves be fooled by the rhetoric of Bush and Blair yet again. Just as all the justifications for the war and occupation of Iraq were proven to be nothing but a pack of lies, the same is true of the war drums being beaten for Iran. Bush's designs on Iran are of a piece with his ambitions in Iraq, which are about re-drawing the map of the Middle East in the image of U.S. imperialism.

Ever since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, in which vast numbers of ordinary Iranians mobilized against the hated regime of the pro-U.S. Shah of Iran, the U.S. ruling elite has worked to regain its lost hegemony in the region.

And the U.S. government is not beneath fomenting sectarian divisions within Iran, as anyone familiar with their strategy in Iraq could guess. The ABC TV network in the U.S. recently revealed that the U.S. has been funneling funds to an armed group operating out of Pakistan. The U.S. has been funding bomb attacks and the seizure of hostages inside Iran.

U.S. officials in Washington had previously linked this group — called Jundullah (Soldiers of God) — to the Taliban in Afghanistan. More than a dozen Iranian soldiers and officials have been killed or kidnapped by the group, which operates out of the Baluchistan province in Pakistan, just across the border from Iran.

The U.S. media has also reported that American intelligence teams have been operating with Kurdish groups, carrying out attacks from northern Iraq across the border into Iran.

Meanwhile an Iranian diplomat who was abducted in Baghdad and held for two months claims he was tortured by his CIA captors. The diplomat, Jalaf Sharafi, says he was seized by members of the Iraqi military who were driving U.S. coalition vehicles. He was held at a base near Baghdad airport where he was questioned in Arabic and English about Iran's influence in Iraq. He was then released by being dumped from a vehicle at the back of the airport complex.

U.S. considers nuclear option

Perhaps most frightening are the revelations in the pieces by Seymour Hersh, which have been echoed elsewhere, about the U.S. considering the option of using nuclear weapons to launch an attack on Iran — the biggest irony of all. "We'll prevent them from gaining nuclear weapons [dangerous in the hands of terrorists like the Iranians] by bombing them with nuclear weapons" — Dr. Strangelove logic at its worst.

In some ways it's hard to judge how serious the Bush administration is in its threats to spread the chaos and slaughter to Iran.

There are disagreements within the ruling class inside the U.S. about whether this would not be the biggest piece of folly yet perpetrated by the Bush administration. But no one should hold their breath while waiting for the victory of the pragmatists. As Noam Chomsky pointed out in a recent article in the Guardian. "A predator becomes even more dangerous and less predictable

when wounded. In desperation to salvage something, the administration might risk even greater disasters.”

It’s very clear that the disaster that Iraq has become is pushing the U.S. administration into a corner in terms of what to do next, if they don’t want to relinquish their status as the world’s cop and therefore as the controller of the world’s resources.

One million Iraqis demonstrate against occupation

But even four years of death and destruction didn’t stop almost one million Iraqi citizens turning up in the streets of Najaf April 9, demanding an end to the U.S. occupation of their country on the fourth anniversary of the fall of Baghdad.

Demonstrators came in convoys of cars and buses draped with Iraqi flags. They traveled from across the country, including from Latifiyah and Mahmudiya, areas that have witnessed sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni Muslims. The Najaf march was called by rebel Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr whose Mehdi Army has launched two insurrections against the occupation since 2003.

In an attempt to counter recent sectarian fighting between Shia and Sunni, Sadr issued a call to his followers not to attack other Iraqis but to turn all their efforts to driving out the occupation. “God had ordered you to be patient in front of your enemy, and unify your efforts against them — not against the sons of Iraq.”

The struggle for unity among Iraq’s resistance organizations was symbolized by the presence of Sunni Muslim delegations on the march, with a Sunni cleric marching at the front of the demonstration.

On the eve of the protest Sheikh Harith al-Dari, the head of the influential Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars, blamed the occupation for being behind the “discord” in the country. He said Iraq has become “a vast prison, a graveyard that is devouring hundreds of thousands”, and that the U.S. wants “to silence any voice of opposition and to put an end to the Iraqi people’s resistance to the occupation.”

There is no doubt that the level of sectarian violence has increased since the beginning of the occupation of Iraq by U.S. and British troops. But we have to be aware of how the occupation forces have fomented and encouraged that sectarianism and how their very presence can only increase the violence.

The Iranian people are not passive and backward

One of the strong themes of this anti-war movement has been our opposition to imperialism — that is, our opposition to the idea and it’s bloody realization in practice — that Western governments and corporations have the right to attack and occupy other countries when there has been no threat to us from those countries.

Just as we have fought the U.S./British/Canadian occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, we need to be vigilant about a possible attack on Iran, for all the same reasons. And we also need to be aware of how our governments and media will use racist propaganda to further their war aims.

One of the ways that Western politicians and media have tried to make the idea of an attack on Iran more palatable is to focus on Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the so-called “mad mullahs” that they claim are in power in Iraq. Bush is couching his attacks on Iran as the U.S. attempt to promote “democracy” and to oppose “Islamic extremism.”

The Iranian government is demonized while the people of the country are portrayed as powerless victims in need of rescuing by the West. The picture of Iranians as passive, cowed and backward is a travesty of the truth. Some 70 percent of Iran’s population are under 30 years old, and they are prominent voices in a vibrant culture of political debate.

Today Farsi is the world’s fourth most frequently used language for keeping online journals. The growth of weblogs in Iran is phenomenal (700,000 of them last year), incorporating anyone from female taxi drivers to established clerics. You can find postings on issues such as the hijab ban in France to the legacy of political figures such as Mohammed Mossadegh, the nationalist president of Iran overthrown by a CIA-backed coup in 1953. These young people constitute a large section of the grassroots support for Iran’s democracy movement.

Women are active participants

We must also forcibly reject the myth of Iranian women as victims. They are active participants in civil society where they form a third of all doctors, 60 percent of civil servants and 80 percent of all teachers. This is not to paint the Iranian regime in rose-coloured glasses. Ahmadinejad is a social conservative, and although he promised to tackle the corruption, unemployment, and inequality that has characterized Iran’s economy since the introduction of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, he has by and large failed to deliver.

The key civil rights movements in Iran involve women, students and workers. Some 64 % of the country’s students are women. These movements are demanding more democratic rights, especially for women, but they also want jobs and an end to economic inequality. They are also adamantly opposed to U.S. imperialism in the Middle East.

In fact, the threat of a U.S. attack on Iran is only allowing right wing elements in Iran’s ruling class to crack down on the country’s mass movements under the pretext of national security.

Simin Royanian, an economist and 37-year veteran of the anti-imperialist and peace and justice movement in Iran and in the U.S., cofounded Women for Peace and Justice in Iran. She wrote the following in 2003 in response to the assertion, “Under the Shah women had all the rights. When Islamic radicals took over they lost them. How is that U.S. imperialism?”

After explaining that women did not have all rights under the Shah, she discussed the process of fighting for women’s rights in post-Shah Iran:

“As a result of the combination of all these efforts within and in opposition to the system women have made progress in many areas. Today, female students form more than half of the entering class in Iran’s universities. There are many more women in Parliament than there ever were during the previous government; there is a well developed birth control program in place which received an award from the UN about five years ago.

“According to UN WHO statistics, infant mortality and teen-age pregnancy rates in Iran are much lower than those in most third-world countries. For the last two years several women’s organizations have publicly celebrated March 8th as International Women’s Day in Tehran and other cities around the country. Now, there are women publishers and all-women publishing houses, printing books and pamphlets on women’s issues from secular and even left points of view.

“All of this in spite of, not because of the form of government in Iran.

“This is true of all rights movements of people around the world. People have always struggled hard and long to gain their human rights....

“Colonialism and imperialism have always impeded the struggle of ordinary people to better their lives economically, socially, and politically. That is why the main impediment to the progress of human rights, including the rights of women is the intervention of U.S. imperialism in the affairs of the people of the third world.

“The imposition of the autocratic rule of the shah on the people of Iran through the 1953 CIA coup, the complete repression of any movement by the people, postponed the advancement of rights in Iran for decades. In addition, the elimination of any secular and left opposition to the rule of the Shah and U.S. imperialism, contributed greatly to the superiority of the Islamic forces when the revolution was eventually won.

“This is what imperialism does. It supports the fundamentalist rule in Saudi Arabia, builds and arms the Taliban to overthrow a government friendly to the Soviet Union, arms and helps Saddam Hussein against the Iranian people for eight years, supports the Turkish military massacre of the Kurdish people, assassinates democratically elected leaders in Latin America, and on and on. That is why U.S. imperialism has been and is the main impediment of peace and justice for people all over the world.”

There will be pressure on the global anti-war movement to side with Western governments against the Iranian regime, which has persecuted left wingers and civil rights activists. This pressure must be resisted.

It is only the power of grassroots movements against imperialism and neoliberalism that can bring peace and human rights to the Middle East.

One of the main responsibilities of the antiwar movement in the West and here in Canada, is to side with the people of Iran against the forces of Western imperialism now — and even more in

the event of an attack on Iran — and to resist the racist and Islamophobic distortions of politicians and media alike.

(This article includes information from the British *Socialist Worker* weekly newspaper.)