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Socialist Voice #360, October 5, 2009

Honduras: The Threat of Foreign Military Occupation

LeftViews is Socialist Voice’s forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion. In this article, an activist in the Honduran resistance meditates on the danger his country faces of a Haiti-style foreign military intervention.

Ricardo Arturo Salgado is a Honduran sociologist and writer working with rural workers and fishers. He is an active member of the National Front for Resistance Against the Coup (FNRG) and resides in Tegucigalpa.

by Ricardo Arturo Salgado

Tegucigalpa, September 27, 2009 – The Honduras crisis has sparked great interest among thinkers of both Right and Left up and down the continent. Many people are reflecting on events, using all the analytical tools their knowledge permits. There is wide scope for speculation, mainly because – for most people – the actions of different forces have been so unexpected in character.

President Zelaya carried out his return to Honduras in a way that astonished everyone, both the coup-makers and most of his followers (myself included). Of course, the countries that are said to have participated in the operation do all they can to deny prior knowledge of his trip.

Meanwhile, the coup regime's "unanticipated" logistical capacity, the mobilization of all its forces, and the implementation of tactics did not fail to surprise observers. Argentine President Cristina Fernandez Kirchner was moved to say that events here have outdone the actions of the chieftains of the Southern Cone during the dictatorships of the seventies and eighties.

Legitimate and strong governments of the continent, such as Brazil, or Mexico (and even Spain) surprised observers by responding to the coup-makers with diplomacy-lite, only to be defied in the style of the Third Reich. At one point, the de facto regime called on all countries to withdraw their ambassadors from Honduran territory, and to name new ambassadors subject to approval from Tegucigalpa. To top that, they gave the Brazilian government ten days to define Zelaya's status in the embassy, and if not, then ...

Could an attack on the embassy of the South American giant really be expedient for Micheletti or someone else here? Wouldn't such an action be the signal for military intervention sponsored by the whole international community, as if it were an act of charity? Isn't this what many see as a solution for the Honduran problem?

Threat of a provocative attack

Let's explore and speculate a little about what happens in this possible scenario.

1. The fascist regime, contrary to what was expected after the UN resolutions, maintains and increases its savage repression against the occupants of the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa (this, in fact, is precisely what has happened).
2. The fascist regime launches a media campaign to justify its hostility to many governments in the region (they have already done this; last night its list included Mexico, Spain, Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil – but curiously the United States is left off the list).
3. The international community remains stupefied but fails to confront the situation correctly, above all necessary measures to sink the regime economically. This has been going on from day one of the coup; especially since [Costa Rican president] Arias entered on the stage to boycott the resolutions of the entire international community.
4. The coup-makers decide to enter the Brazilian embassy by force. They take it over and create enormous confusion inside during which some resistance leaders are killed, even President Zelaya. (This has been minutely prepared during the past few days, while the regime ignored international calls to defend the president's safety and the inviolability of the diplomatic legation).
5. Simultaneously, they assassinate a large number of established and emerging leaders of the Honduran revolutionary process. They count on a lapse of at least a week's time before the international community reacts. This plan doesn't appear fictional; on the night

of September 23 the police and army actually tried to hunt down teachers and resistance leaders in the city of Danlí in El Paraíso province. They have opened thousands of police files on an enormous number of resistance supporters across the country.

6. The material authors of the coup slip out of the country to a secure place. The most likely is Panama, a fiscal paradise and center of drug trafficking with an ultra-right government and an opposition that is incapable, at least for now, of mounting any significant actions and pressure against the upsetting guests. (Yes, here everything is my speculation.)
7. International forces intervene in the country. After a few skirmishes with some rank-and-file soldiers, the invaders call on both sides to have a dialog. In the name of peace and democracy, pro-coup candidates [for the scheduled November 29 election], pro-coup private enterprises, pro-coup media, the self-anointed civil society, and the pro-coup church go into the dialog, licking their lips. Likewise, the new authority reorganizes the state in the name of God and reconciliation of the Honduran people, upholding the century-old bipartisan status quo. As this unfolds, the new forces of order pursue the task of repressing the people until they are pacified.

Possible intervention to aid the Right

The idea that foreign military intervention would benefit the Right more than anyone else is not, it seems, off the wall. Such action would allow them to destroy, or so they hope, any advance by progressive movements and people mobilized in the resistance.

As the de facto government was escalating its repression on September 23, President Zelaya stressed that no foreign intervention will be welcome and that a solution must be found in the framework of dialog. The coup regime reacted to this with even more violence. It is clear that President Zelaya understands that to cry out for military intervention would be to jump off the cliff, exactly as the coup-makers hope we will do.

How can we avoid going down that road? The National Resistance Front against the Coup (FNRG), coordinated by worker, farmer, and teacher leaders, alongside the president of the republic, has called for a general mobilization for the “final offensive.” The FNRG is trying to pressure the regime with a demonstration of its organizational capacity to lead the mass movement. This is, from all angles, the best strategy to take within the country.

The alternative of sanctions

The countries of Latin America, especially Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina (and also Spain) should look into specific ways, including physical measures, to defend their diplomatic installations in Honduras, in order to prevent the coup regime from carrying out its plan. These countries, with the exception of Venezuela, have good possibilities for pressuring the Yankee government to deploy military forces to defend their embassies. Those gringo soldiers are already here in the Soto Cano base.

A serious, firm, and ongoing campaign should be launched to pressure the Panamanian government to control the inflow of Honduran capital. In the last three months large amounts of

Honduran money have been transferred from banks in the United States to Panamanian banks. We must pressure Panama not to support the aims of the Honduran coup.

The gringo administration must be pressured to freeze without delay access of the coup regime to Honduran monetary reserves held in gringo banks (this measure has been applied to many other countries). All monetary transactions to Honduras, including family remittances, should be blocked.

We must also demand that the Honduran armed forces reveal where they got the whole arsenal of arms they now possess.

The coup was engineered by Honduran big business. All preferential commercial treaties should be abrogated in order to cut off their access to foreign currency. The gringos are not strangers to these ideas. They have practiced a criminal blockade against the Cuban people for 50 years, supposedly to defend liberty. This time the U.S. should act, for valid moral reasons.

Such pressure on businessmen will result in them trying to bring about a rapid resolution of the crisis to protect their own interests.

We know that all this is hardly realistic. In the end the Empire is the Empire. It will not give in to all of these demands. But getting even a few concessions from them would be a victory for Latin America.

Effective solidarity needed

Another important issue is the immediate organization of an effective solidarity movement with the people of Honduras and their resistance in all fields – food, technology, computers, self-defense tactics and strategies, and whatever is necessary to maintain and increase this liberation process.

We are not inappropriate to remind Latin American presidents that we are struggling against an illegal and illegitimate government. This affords juridical and moral support for undertaking a thousand-and-one forms of solidarity to undermine and weaken the fascist regime.

My speculations about the possible course of events shows the need to rapidly analyze this situation in order to take the most reliable path forward. To repeat, we have to ask the right questions to get the best answers.

Victory is near, we can't give ourselves the luxury of making errors.

No to foreign intervention in complicity with the coup!

Yes to peoples' solidarity!

Hasta la victoria siempre – Ever onwards to victory!

Socialist Voice #361, October 5, 2009

Crucial days in Honduras

by Carlos Torchia

A presentation to the Sept. 26 Toronto teach-in on the mass resistance in Honduras to the June 28 military coup. Carlos Torchia is a spokesperson for the Latin American Solidarity Network-Toronto, and a member of the Venezuela We Are With You Coalition. This talk was also published in rabble.ca

President Manuel Zelaya's return to Honduras was a great day for democracy. His return was a victory for the heroic Honduran people who have fought tooth and nail against the fascist military. It was a victory for the international solidarity movement of which we proudly form a part. It was a victory for the majority of Latin American governments, particularly for Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Cuba, who from the moment of the coup d'état [June 28] have supported the Honduran people's struggle and demanded the return of President Zelaya.

Whatever the final outcome of this struggle, two things are clear.

First of all, the traditional imperial intervention in Latin America through orchestration of coups d'état has shown cracks once again, this time in Honduras. The Empire gave the green light to the coup, afraid of the domino effect of Zelaya's decision to join ALBA and afraid that his liberal reforms would open the dam for more radical demands from Honduran social movements. Now, the Empire and the Honduran oligarchy face a dilemma. With Zelaya back in Tegucigalpa, the social movements' call for a Constituent Assembly, re-foundation of the country and participatory democracy has been strengthened.

The initiative belongs to the social movements

Honduras today is not the Honduras of 90 days ago. The political initiative belongs to the social movements and their organizations. The political consciousness of the people has grown through the struggle, and they are determined to defend Zelaya, as he remains under siege at the Brazilian embassy. The people have already declared some districts liberated in Tegucigalpa.

The situation is grave and volatile. As a leader of the resistance put it: "Everything is possible in Honduras." The assassination of Manuel Zelaya is possible, stimulated by the complicit silence of Barack Obama at the United Nations' General Assembly: not a single word on Honduras.

We forecast crucial days ahead, which will demand all our capacity in organizing solidarity and demanding unambiguous actions from the Canadian government in support of President Zelaya and the return of democracy to Honduras.

Secondly, and without belittling the tremendous courage and consistency of President Zelaya in demanding his rights as the legitimate head of state, the Honduran experience shows that in the last instance the people's determination to fight for their rights, their land and their resources, is the decisive factor and the force that makes leaders grow and rise to meet the circumstances.

For the second time in recent Latin American history, the people did not go home after the coup, nor did they accept defeat; Honduran people remained on the streets, declared strikes, denounced the regime's atrocities, organized themselves as the National Front of Resistance Against the Coup and demanded international solidarity.

In this regard, the Latin American Solidarity Network is proud to have been able to send a delegation to Honduras to deliver a statement of solidarity and to bear witness against the ferocious fascist repression.

The coup was not only against Honduras

However, and as we have said from day one, the coup was not only against the reforms in Honduras. We considered it to be also a warning to recently elected progressive governments in the region to refrain from joining ALBA. It was symptomatic that the coup in Honduras occurred four days after three additional nations — Ecuador, Antigua and Barbuda, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines — joined ALBA.

A warning about what Latin American countries could expect from U.S. imperialism came very early from Simón Bolívar, in his well known commentary of 1829: "The United States is predestined to plague America with misery in the name of freedom." And this has been precisely the outcome of the relationship between our continent and the Empire.

Our people have paid dearly for the easy access enjoyed by the transnational corporations to natural resources, land, public enterprises and cheap labor, with the result of 100 million of Latin Americans living on one dollar a day, and another 100 million living on two dollars a day. However, in the last 20 years Latin American social movements started to say enough is enough, not only rebelling against neo-liberalism, but also against capitalism, and in the case of Venezuela and Bolivia, posing the necessity to build a socialist society, where the priority will be human needs rather than economic growth and profits.

The Honduran coup shows that the U.S. imperialism, always in alliance with local oligarchies, is committed to reversing this wave of rebellion in Latin America, and to destroying any process of radical social transformation, or even soft liberal reforms as in the case of Honduras. The ever-present need of capital to expand requires the Empire to act on its behalf, from Mexico to Patagonia.

More military bases in Colombia

In fact, as the coup was taking place in Honduras, Washington unleashed aggression on Venezuela by announcing the installation of five new military bases in Colombia, bordering Venezuela and Ecuador, which in actuality will serve the Empire to threaten the whole region. In total Venezuela will be surrounded by 20 military bases. No democratic government is safe anymore in Latin America.

This afternoon we have an exciting teach-in about the situation in Honduras, about Venezuela and Colombia and the Imperial foreign policy of Canada and the U.S. We have invited a mix of social activists and academicians to address these topics. We hope you will actively participate with your questions and comments.

This teach-in is our contribution to the International Day of Solidarity with Honduras, and our humble salute to the heroic struggle of Honduran people.

We hope that after this teach-in we will emerge stronger and with concrete tasks to raise our solidarity work with Latin American people to a new level, along with our Canadian allies. We don't consider ourselves to be struggling in a vacuum, because after all, the struggles of Latin American people are not so different from the those we must wage in Canada for better public education, health care, public transportation, decent salaries, First Nations rights to self-determination, women's and immigrants' rights, protection of the environment, and substantive democracy; and against militarism and occupation

Long live the Honduran people!

Socialist Voice #362, October 5, 2009

B.C. Government Prepares to Axe Social Programs

by Ian Beeching

As its government boasts to the world that Canada has escaped the worst of the 2008 world financial collapse, a sharp economic downturn is taking hold in the country. Its most visible expression is a sharp rise in unemployment as factory and natural resource production drops. Now, cuts to government spending on social programs, and sharp hikes in the share of taxes paid by working people, are rearing their heads.

The ten provincial governments in Canada have the primary responsibility for delivering social programs. Three of the most prosperous – British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario – are staring at record or near-record budget deficits for fiscal 2009-10. As tax revenues drop like a stone, they are turning to spending cuts, and the pace of those cuts will accelerate in coming months. These have already provoked angry protests in B.C. over arts funding and in Alberta over health care.

Cuts begin in British Columbia

In its latest budget forecast, announced on September 2, the Liberal Party government in British Columbia announced a \$2.8 billion deficit for the coming year, up from \$495 million in a pre-election announcement in February. It's the first time since the party's first election in 2001 that the government will contradict its dogma that running a government deficit is akin to inviting the Devil to dine. Economic output is predicted to decline by 2.9 per cent over the next year and unemployment is projected to rise to 8.3 per cent, double the rate of 2008.

The budget outlines cuts in social services, including some \$360 million in health care, and the introduction of a new sales tax regime that would "harmonize" the 7 per cent provincial sales tax with the 5 per cent federal Goods and Services Tax. The new tax gives major breaks to big business but adds to the tax burden on consumers. A wage freeze on public sector employees was announced.

Despite the budget shortfalls, the government is pressing forward with massive spending and tax relief projects that amount to giveaways to construction, tourism and mining industries. Among these are the 2010 Winter Olympics and related infrastructure projects and policing expenses, totalling several billions of dollars; expansion of coal, oil and gas extraction and hard-rock mining projects worth billions; and a multi-billion dollar road and rail expansion in the Vancouver region.

Artists speak out

Arts companies and organizations are seeing their funding cut in half, from \$47.8 million this year to \$23.1 million next year. Other, general, arts funding will be cut from \$19.5-million in 2008-09 to \$2.25-million in 2010-11 and \$2.2-million in 2011-12. Many arts organizations traditionally funded by casino levies could be getting millions less. No other province in Canada has cut the arts so deeply.

The Alliance for Arts and Culture held an angry protest meeting on the day the budget was announced with some 300 to 400 artists present. Strategies on how to react to the cuts were debated for more than two hours. Many in the arts community are urging a boycott of performing at the Olympics.

A rally was held on September 9 at the Vancouver Art Gallery attended by more than one thousand people, many dressed in sombre grey.

Greenwashing taking a hit

The Campbell government has been falsely painted by many mainstream environmental groups as committed to environmental enhancement. Most of that praise comes by virtue of a two cent per litre gasoline tax, a so-called “carbon tax,” introduced in 2008. These groups are now questioning their appraisal.

One reason is that the Ministry of Environment budget has been cut from \$225-million in 2008-09 to \$184-million by 2012. Another is that industries responsible for massive expansions in carbon emissions, including present and future oil, coal and gas development in the southeast and northeast of the province, continue to benefit from huge tax breaks and subsidies. A proposed natural gas development in a pristine area in the mountainous southeast of the province has stirred up significant protest by environmentalists and state governments in the northwest United States

Eighteen million dollars has been cut from a fund intended to deal with the infestation of beetles that has devastated the province’s vast pine forests and is caused by rising winter temperatures.

In the lucrative salmon fishery on the Fraser River, the world’s largest salmon fishery, this year’s sockeye species has suffered a catastrophic decline. More than ten million adult fish were expected to make the return to the river’s spawning grounds; just over one million arrived, forcing a cancellation of the fishery. The decline is strongly linked to the provincial and federal governments’ forestry policies causing deforestation and destruction of salmon habitat, their promotion of destructive urban development, and the proliferation of polluting salmon farms along the province’s coastline.

The public transit authority in the Vancouver region faces growing demands for services but has been denied the funding it needs. At the governments’ direction, it sank \$2 billion into a new rapid transit line that will serve the Olympic Games and profit real estate developers but serve only a small percentage of the region’s population. The majority of residents have poor or non-existent transit service while fares are rising sharply and the government sinks billions into roads.

“We’ve all taken some pain in this budget, but I’m a bit shocked by the cuts,” said Jeffrey Young from the David Suzuki Foundation, a well-known environmental group that has become infamous for supporting the provincial government’s greenwashing policies.

Education

Students have plenty of reason to be angered with the budget and the state of education in the province. By the year 2011, more will be paid by students in post secondary tuition—\$1.14 billion— than in corporate income tax—\$1.038 billion. That’s a dramatic turnaround in the tax regime. The budget also implemented a \$17 million cut to student aid.

The government has eliminated \$110 million in expected grants intended for repairing schools. According to Connie Denesiuk, president of the British Columbia School Trustees Association, school districts will face “staff layoffs of carpenters, electricians, painters and so on. It’s going to be difficult to get some of these people back again.”

With student debt already in the billions, the cuts impact accessibility to training required for an economy that is already short of nurses, doctors and other trained professions and trades.

Health care faces the axe

In August, Health Minister Kevin Falcon told health authorities to cut \$360 million from their budgets. The Fraser Health Authority, serving the suburbs of Burnaby, New Westminster and the Fraser valley, is facing a budget shortfall of \$160 million. Health authorities are suggesting reductions in “elective” surgeries in fiscal 2009-2010 in the order of 10% to 15%.

The Interior Health authority (interior regions of the province) has a shortfall of \$28 million in its administration and support budget and it could soon face a further \$12 million shortfall for surgeries, resulting in cutting or postponing elective surgeries, CT scans, MRIs and other diagnostic procedures.

A recent report from Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (Vancouver region) outlined potential closing of 13.5 operating rooms between now and March 2010; postponing 5,800 surgeries in areas such as neurosurgery, vascular surgery, ortho trauma, ophthalmology and general surgery; reducing operating-room and hospital-ward staff by an estimated 112 full-time-equivalent jobs; and cutting 13 anaesthesiology positions.

The government is cutting \$1 million in grants to community organizations for seniors’ day care programs, \$450,000 from programs to assist isolated seniors, and \$450,000 from mental health and addiction grants, including supports to victim of abuse.

“We know that on the front lines, we are losing jobs and we are losing services,” Debra McPherson, president of the British Columbia Nurses Union, said in Victoria. “We are losing services for frail seniors that would allow them to stay longer in their homes. We are losing public health nurses on the eve of an H1N1 epidemic and mass immunization drive.”

To meet the budget shortfall, the recent budget announced a six per cent increase in the monthly Medical Services Plan fees that income earners must pay. B.C. is the only province that still collects this regressive tax.

According to Judy Darcy, head of the Hospital Employees’ Union, a projected increase in some areas of health care spending will be less than required to meet demands: “It means longer wait

times for surgeries, it means seniors' programs are cut, services like labs and diagnostics are all facing budget cuts – that is going to have a direct impact on the quality of patient care.”

Higher sales tax

The provincial government has moved to harmonize its sales tax with Ottawa's Goods and Services Tax, creating a new, so-called Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). As a result, businesses will pay \$2-billion less in taxes while items that were not taxed under the outgoing provincial sales tax will now be paid under the HST. These include household utilities, vitamins, over-the-counter drugs, taxis, restaurant meals and haircuts. Seniors and low income families will be hit the hardest.

Agencies that run care homes for the elderly say the HST will increase their costs by more than \$10 million. It will also add thousands of dollars to the already outrageous cost of buying a house.

Anti-HST rallies were held in some 19 cities on September 19. About 1,000 people rallied outside the Trade and Convention Centre in Vancouver. With over 80 per cent of the province opposed to the new tax, the rallies have included participants from across the political spectrum.

Added pressure on working people is coming from blackmailing by paper and other forestry manufacturers in seven towns in the interior of the province. They are refusing to pay tens of millions of dollars in municipal taxes, potentially crippling the vital services that municipalities provide. The companies want sharp reductions in the taxes they pay.

Challenge facing the labour movement

The September budget marks only the beginning of a new round of sustained attacks on the social wage. The government has loads of experience in such attacks. It will roll them out in bits and pieces over the coming months so as to better blunt and divide anticipated opposition. This presents a considerable challenge and responsibility on the trade unions.

One of the first lines of defence against deepening cuts to the social wage is the unions. What's more, the unions should be at the forefront of struggles to tackle rising unemployment, poverty-level minimum wage and welfare rates, and the ongoing degradation of the environment. Are they up to the task?

The last serious challenge to the government was the 2005 teachers strike. That ended in a victory for teachers and public education. But strikes have been rare in BC in recent years, and victories even rarer. Far more consequential than the teachers' strike was the defeat of the hospital workers strike in 2004. There, a broad movement towards a general strike in support of the 40,000 striking health care workers was cut short by a panicked BC Federation of Labour and its political affiliate, the New Democratic Party.

Since 2004, the union movement has simply lost much of its will and capacity to fight. One glaring manifestation of that is the disgraceful minimum wage-it has sat frozen at \$8 per hour since 2001 and is now the lowest in Canada.

Civil liberties groups are decrying the police-state apparatus and policies being assembled for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, and social rights groups contrast the lavish spending on the Olympics with cuts to education and health care. Many are preparing energetic protests against the Games in the face of threats of arrests and extreme repression. The unions, the NDP and “progressive” municipal parties are deeply compromised in their capacity to champion these issues because they supported the Games from the get go. In fact, it was the pre-2001 NDP government that initiated the bid for the Games.

The labour movement and other social activists could learn a thing or two from the resistance of Indigenous peoples to the Liberal assault. For several years, the provincial and federal governments have been promoting a “Recognition and Reconciliation Act” that aimed to abolish land ownership and other rights of self determination of the approximately 200,000 Indigenous peoples in the province.

In exchange for abolition of Aboriginal title, Indigenous governing authorities would be granted powers equivalent to those of municipal governments. Meanwhile, Indigenous organizations and leaders would gain a slice of revenue from mining and other natural resource projects. The Liberals hoped this deal would be a green light to projects that are presently stalled by the uncertainties surrounding existing or future Indigenous land claims and other social rights.

The proposed act was dropped earlier this year when Indigenous leaders supporting it ran into a solid wall of opposition as they tried to sell it in their communities.

Socialist Voice #363, October 7, 2009

Positive Developments in the European Left

One of Socialist Voice's editors outlines some recent positive developments in the European left.

LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion.

by Ian Angus

LeftViews recently published an article by Alex Callinicos, a central leader of Britain's Socialist Workers Party, on the state of the left in Europe. While conceding that there have been some gains, overall the picture he painted was dire.

Callinicos is an insightful writer on leftwing politics in Europe, and much of his analysis rings true. I'm certainly not going to try to offer a different analysis from my vantage point well west of the Atlantic.

But by itself, his article might leave *Socialist Voice* readers with a picture of unrelieved gloom, when in fact there are some bright spots of note. In Germany and Portugal, leftwing parties made modest but important gains in last month's elections, while in France and England we're seeing constructive steps towards greater unity on the left.

Germany

Press accounts of the September 27 German elections stressed the collapse of the Social Democratic party (SPD) vote by one-third to 23%, its worst showing since 1953. It is questionable whether the SPD's decline can properly be interpreted as a loss for the "Left," since the SPD's program and conduct in office has been virtually indistinguishable from those of the explicitly neoliberal parties. Much less media attention has been paid to the growth of the vote for Die Linke (The Left) which took 11.9%, 3.2 percentage points more than in the previous election. The party now has 76 members in the Bundestag, up from 54. In most parts of the former East Germany, Die Linke is now the largest party.

Die Linke was founded in 2007 by the merger of the former East German Communist party with a left-wing split-off from the SPD. In this election it called for a 10 euro minimum wage, a wealth tax, and withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Portugal

In the Portuguese elections, also held on September 27, the neoliberal Socialist Party held on to power, but its vote fell from 45% in 2005 (which gave it a majority in the legislature) to just over 36%, its the lowest vote since 1991. At the same time, the Left Bloc increased its vote from 6% to nearly 10%, and doubled its representation in the Assembly from 8 to 16 members.

In a 2007 interview, Left Bloc leader Francisco Louça described the party as "a pluralist party of the socialist Left."

“When the Bloc was formed, eight years ago, we made a political choice which I believe is still valid: to create our party on the basis of the political confrontations which define our activity and not on the basis of a priori ideological cohesion. We thus brought together very different traditions, coming from the Communist Party, Maoist or revolutionary Marxist (Trotskyist) currents, as well as people from independent social movements. The possibility of building this regroupment, in a very defensive situation, implied that we were able to formulate political proposals and to have an impact on society. So we started not by discussing a programme of historical reference, but a programme of political intervention.

“We defined ourselves as socialists shortly after our foundation, in a double sense: initially, by rejecting “real socialism” (Stalinism, the experiences of the USSR, Eastern Europe or China), then by identifying ourselves with the anti-capitalist struggle, against the social-democratic experience and its current social-liberal version.

“In this sense, we defend the idea of collective ownership. But what is really important, in particular for the organizations which followed the path of small minority groups, is to find the means of expressing political ideas which fight to have an influence on the masses. So we translated our socialist ideas into specific proposals, very much linked to the modalities of political life in Portugal.

“For example, we recently proposed the socialization of the services of water, energy, etc., and one of our principal campaigns this year centres on the defence, the modernization and the transformation of the national health service. That enables us to concretize our perspective of socialization on the basis of social needs and concrete struggles.” (International Viewpoint, January 2008)

France

In France, the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA – formed in February 2009 on the initiative of the Trotskyist Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, which then dissolved itself) recently called on the entire “anti-neoliberal and anticapitalist Left” to begin discussions about joint action in the 2010 regional elections.

A first meeting on September 28 resulted in a joint declaration signed by six groups: the Federation for a Social and Ecological Alternative (FASE), United Left, Alternatives, the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), the French Communist Party (PCF), the Communist Party of French Workers (PCOF), and the Left Party (PG). Two other groups, the Social Forum of Popular Neighbourhoods (FSQP) and Workers’ Struggle (LO), attended the meeting as observers.

The declaration says, in part:

“In a situation characterized by a growing attack by the political right and the employers against the broad sweep of social and democratic rights, we issue a call to support and build the broadest and most united mobilizations and struggles possible around a perspective of political and social confrontation with the government and the employers. The ultimate goal is to inflict a defeat on this reactionary power.

“Issues are not lacking – the privatization of the postal service, the proliferation of layoffs, the spread of Sunday work days, the trend toward temporary and part-time work and insecure living conditions, the undermining of the right to education for all, the increase in hospitalization fees, the erosion of public freedoms, and the mass deportations of immigrant workers.

“Many demonstrations and social and political initiatives are taking place as we meet in the early fall. We support them all, such as the proposed referendum on the privatization of the postal service, the demonstration for women’s rights on October 17, the marches for jobs, against job insecurity and layoffs or the initiatives in response to the “climate” summit in Copenhagen. ...

“In the face of an increasingly brutal and savage capitalist system and a government determined to accelerate the pace of its attacks, nothing should stand in the way of the necessary construction of an alternative to the logic of the capitalist and productivist system. On this basis, we must strive to win the majority of workers and citizens to the perspectives opened by a militant political Left. These are our priorities.

“However, given the determination of the Sarkozy government, we are witnessing instead a new shift to the right by the soft Left as it attempts to build a centre-left coalition ... This is a Left that continues to shift to the right and thus risks its own electoral prospects as the unfortunate situation in Italy recently proves.

“In this context, the forces that make up the anti-neoliberal and anticapitalist Left have a duty to do everything possible to defeat the right and offer a different path – a political outlet that could implement a program reflecting the demands of the mass mobilizations in the regions, a regional program that is a real alternative to liberalism and productivism.

“The overall challenge is not only to counter the political onslaught of the right and liberalism and defend the demands of the workers movement, but even more to reverse the balance of forces at the polls and in the struggles. ...

“Together we can help reverse the relationship of forces between the political right, the employers and the popular classes in struggle and at the polling booths.” [*Translation by Richard Fidler of original text in French.*]

The delegates agreed to take the statement back to their organizations for discussion, and to meet again on October 7.

England

Callinicos’s article is particularly scathing about Britain, where despite “a decade’s sustained efforts at socialist regroupment,” there is still no united Left electoral alternative to the Conservatives and New Labour. He describes the Respect party led by George Galloway and Salma Yaqoob as “once the most promising product of these efforts,” but – perhaps understandably – he is silent about the role of the SWP’s 2007 walkout in weakening that group.

Several British groups, including the SWP, have this year called for renewed efforts at left unity, but none of these appeals has yet produced anything resembling a practical result. The failures of previous combinations have left a legacy of distrust that will be difficult to overcome.

So it is encouraging to see the following statement, adopted unanimously on September 30 by the Steering Committee of Green Left, the ecosocialist wing of the Green Party of England and Wales:

“Green Left calls upon our fellow Green Party members in Birmingham not to stand a candidate in the constituency of Birmingham Hall Green in the coming general election in order to give a strong, progressive and environmentally aware candidate the chance of taking the seat.

“We believe that Salma Yaqoob of Respect is the candidate most likely to do this and her victory would be a victory for all those opposing the policies of privatisation, war, greed, racism and environmental destruction.

“We believe that this is an opportunity for the progressive movement in Birmingham to unite behind one candidate and not to make the mistakes of the European election, where a divided Left opened the way to the election of racists and bigots.

“For the benefit of the people of Birmingham and of radical politics in this country we ask the Green Party in Birmingham to stand aside and not to oppose Salma Yaqoob. We are firmly of the belief that this will benefit both the Green and progressive movements in this country and send out a signal that we are serious in challenging the neo-liberal economic policies of the three main parties as well as Fascism and racism.”

In my experience (in politics and elsewhere), the best way to get disparate groups to unite is often to identify a specific project and “just do it.” By unilaterally declaring its support for Respect in Birmingham, Green Left is setting an example that could well do much more to advance the cause of united Left action than any attempt to resolve all political disagreements in advance. It’s a small step forward, but it definitely bears watching.

Socialist Voice #364, October 13, 2009

Indigenous people are the vanguard of the fight to save the earth

LeftViews: an interview with Hugo Blanco

LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion.

Peruvian peasant leader Hugo Blanco, who now edits the newspaper La Lucha Indigena, was interviewed on August 28 in Arequipa, in southern Peru. The previous day he gave a presentation at a conference entitled "40 Años de la Reforma Agraria" at the city's Universidad Nacional de San Agustín. This article is excerpted from a longer interview which appeared in World War 4 Report.

You said last night that today the indigenous peoples of the Amazon are in the vanguard of the struggle in Peru. Can you say more about this?

The struggle is no longer just to free the land, but to defend the land against the poisoning taking place at the hands of the mining companies in the Sierra [mountains], and the oil and gas operations in the Selva [rainforest] – poisoning the rivers, killing the fish, killing the birds, and killing the people too. There are still many struggles in the Sierra-in Cajamarca, in Piura. Just yesterday there was a struggle in this department [Arequipa] at Islay, where several people were hurt. But these struggles are scattered, dispersed. In turn, the *amazonicos*, despite having 50 different nationalities and languages, have united-the amazonicos of the north, the center the south. They have united to coordinate a democratic and peaceful struggle. Last year, they had a struggle and won concessions from the government. Now they are waging another struggle, and the government has responded with arms. But again, the government was forced to retreat and overturn these two laws. They have gained another triumph.

This was a peaceful struggle that was treasonously attacked by the government, but the indigenas captured arms from the police and defended themselves. So I think this is a lesson – and not just for Peru, but for the world. Throughout the world, many people are concerned about the environment-and with good reason, because as the United Nations has recognized, in another 100 years there could be no humanity. Due to global warming, provoked by the big corporations, whose only imperative is to make as much money as possible in as little time as possible. We can protest, publish articles, but the big corporations keep doing what they want, defended by the world's governments. The way to resist this is the path taken by the *amazonicos*.

And this struggle is not over. Their leaders are meeting this month to evaluate the next step. Probably they will not return to the road blockades they have been carrying for the past months. But they will not allow the companies to enter their territories. So I say the *amazonicos* are teaching the Peruvians and all the world how to defend nature and defend the survival of the human species.

But your own heritage is as a leader of the campesino struggle...

Yes, we had to struggle. The Spanish came here looking for spices, but they didn't find spices, they found gold and silver. But in agrarian question, they applied the feudal system of Europe—where the feudal lords had the best lands, and they were worked by the serfs in exchange for a little piece of land to work for themselves. And this survived the revolution for independence; nothing changed for the *indios*. It was done away with in Mexico with the uprising of Zapata. It was done away with in [the altiplano of] Bolivia in 1952, with the Bolivian uprising that year. But here it persisted. In 1962, we began a struggle to recuperate the land for those who work it. And when the government violently attacked us we were obliged to take up arms. But finally the government was forced to pass an agrarian reform law recognizing that the land belongs to the campesinos.

I was in prison for eight years. They wanted to give me the death penalty, but thanks to the international solidarity I won, they were not able to kill me. And it was thanks to that international solidarity that after eight years I was liberated. So now I feel that my obligation is to struggle for those who are imprisoned in the struggle for the Amazon—to fight for them as others fought for me.

Until now, the Amazonian peoples have been very isolated, and have not been involved in the class struggle in Peru. Do you think now, with the process of globalization, they are becoming a part of the broader social struggle in the nation?

Their struggle is not about class. Their struggle is to defend the natural environment where they have lived for millennia. But now this nature – which they regard as their mother – is under attack. The timber companies cutting the trees, the oil companies poisoning the rivers—this is what their uprising is against. They do not understand it as a class struggle. But nonetheless, it is a struggle against the multinational corporations which are defended by the government. So we understand that it is related to the class struggle.

In your 1968 book *Tierra o Muerte*, there is a lot of the ideology of Trotsky. Are you still a Trotskyist?

This book is a polemical work that I wrote, because we were in debate against Stalinism, which then took the line of only working within the law, struggling through the judicial process and so on. Whereas we took the position that a guerilla movement was necessary for revolution. So it was a debate between these two positions—the reformist position and the *guerillista* position, which holds that the people must organize themselves, and when the people decide that there is no other option but to take up arms, they should take up arms. But it is the people who must decide, not any group or party.

So I defended Trotsky because the struggle was against Stalinism. Am I still a Trotskyist? I'm not sure. In certain senses I am, and in others I am not. Trotsky believed in defending the revolutionary ideas of Marx and Lenin against bureaucratic tendencies. He defended world revolution against the ideas of “socialism in one country” and a “progressive bourgeoisie” and “revolution by stages” and the other Stalinist ideas promoted in the name of Marxism-Leninism. So I was right to be a Trotskyist in this epoch.

One thing Trotsky said which has been vindicated is that if the working class doesn't take power from the bureaucracy, the bureaucracy will be displaced by capitalism. This is what has happened. Today the principal directors of the Soviet Communist Party are the big neoliberals in Russia. Trotsky said that either the working class will triumph, or the bourgeoisie will, that the bureaucracy is not a social class and has no historical future. Unfortunately, its power was not broken by the working class, so it was broken by the bourgeoisie.

But now that there is no Stalinism, why do I have to be a Trotskyist? I don't feel the same imperative. Of course, there are things I have learned from Marx, things I have learned from Lenin, things I have learned from Trotsky – and from other revolutionaries, from Rosa Luxemburg, from Gramsci, from Che Guevara. But now I do not feel it is logical to form a Trotskyist party.

The youth who organized the conference yesterday – they want answers to the questions of *today*. We don't have to resuscitate old debates from the last century. It is enough to still believe that another world is possible. I am old, and if I can teach something about Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and so on, this is something I can contribute. I still believe in standing up and struggling and not pleading with the government, so in this sense I am still a Trotskyist. But I don't feel the need to say, "Listen everybody, this Trotskyism is the answer!"

And when I speak of the *indigenas* of the Amazon as a the vanguard, I do not mean it in the Marxist-Leninist sense, that others should copy their methods. And when I speak to indigenous peoples, I speak of "collectivism," not "communism."

You are perhaps best remembered in Peru as a guerilla fighter, although this was just one brief period of your life. What is your view of armed struggle in the current situation?

I think the *amazonicos* are teaching us that struggles need to be massive and peaceful-but if we are attacked, we have the right to defend ourselves. At the blockades, the *amazonicos* are armed with their spears and bows and arrows and blowguns. But they only use them to defend themselves and their territory from those who invade their territory. If you are attacked with arms, you have the right to defend yourself with arms.

For instance, I do not agree with Sendero Luminoso – and neither with those who believe in taking power by elections. Whether by arms or by elections, both are struggling to take power. In this sense, I am a Zapatista. I do not believe in struggling to *take* power, but to *build* it.... The villages in the Sierra that are standing up to the mining companies are building power. The *indigenas* in the Selva who are now controlling their own territory are building power.

But when the people feel they have to defend themselves with arms, they have the right to take this decision. The rightists in Santa Cruz, in Bolivia, do not want to let the people govern, and meet their peaceful struggle with bullets; so the people have the right to meet this force with bullets, to defend democracy with bullets.

You say that there is a new "industrial latifundio" emerging today.

That's right. Big companies of industrial scale on the coast, tremendously exploiting the agricultural proletariat, the majority of which is not unionized. They get no vacation, they have

no social security. And these industries use agro-chemicals that kill the soil. And it is all for export to the United States, it is not for internal consumption.

So this new “industrial latifundio” is of both agriculture and mining?

Of course – agriculture, mining, oil, timber. All of this is preying on the natural environment. A new agrarian reform is needed to do away with these predatory corporations.

Now nearly every government in South America except Peru and Colombia has gone over to the left to one degree or another. What is your perspective on this phenomenon?

Well, the struggle must continue, no? Like the struggle against the coup in Honduras, the struggle against the mining companies in the Sierra, the oil companies in the Amazon. Probably in the next elections here in Peru, another servant of neoliberalism will win. But what interests me are the social struggles, which must continue under any government.

What do you think of the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador? You said last night that you consider these to be “governments of transition.”

Yes, of course. Chávez and Correa and Morales are very good sometimes, with their discourse against the empire. But we still cannot say that these are governments of the people of below [gente de abajo]. For example, Chávez wants the entire workers’ movement to be an instrument of his government. But the movement must remain independent and take its own positions. So in this I am not in agreement with him. And for this reason, I have not been invited to Venezuela! [Laughs]

I do not like the compromises that were made in the referendum following the constituent assembly in Bolivia, where they decided that 5,000 hectares constitutes a latifundio. To speak of this in Peru would be considered scandalous. This was a compromise with the reactionary governments of the Media Luna.

And when Santa Cruz held its referendum on independence, Morales said, All the the people of Bolivia should mobilize to Santa Cruz and block this illegality. The Bolivian people were advancing, but then Morales said, Oh no, better not to go. The campesinos were ready to block the roads; Morales said, No, please don’t block the roads.

These breaks on the social movements remind me of the breaks applied by Allende in Chile that facilitated the pinochetazo. These breaks indicate counter-revolutionary attitudes. I oppose this. But these attitudes do not mean the government of Bolivia is counter-revolutionary-no! The indigenous councils that are being organized and so on-these are advances. But it is still not a full manifestation.

So when you say “governments of transition,” you mean transition towards what?

A government of all the people. Towards “Good Government Juntas” [councils] in Bolivia and Ecuador and Venezuela!

This is a reference to the governing bodies of the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas. So you see the Zapatista movement as a model?

I completely support the Zapatista movement; that appears to me the correct path. They represent an example of the kind of society that we want to build in the future. They represent an example of government that is accountable to the people. If one of the indigenous leaders in the Good Government Juntas is not functioning well, he can be recalled at any time. And the Zapatista National Liberation Army doesn't govern in their territory. It assures that the Mexican national army doesn't molest the people. The Good Government Juntas govern, providing education and so on, without one *centavo* from the government.

And they wanted this system constitutionally recognized through the San Andres Accords, and when this was rejected by the Mexican congress in favor of the government's proposal, they declared all the political parties of Mexico to be traitors, and they participate in no elections. Instead, during the presidential race [in 2006], they held the Other Campaign, and traveled throughout the country asking people what problems they had, and how can we confront them. Not putting forth a line, but coordinating with the people.

And they are also doing this at the international level. For example, the people from New York who are trying to save their homes, also participated in the Other Campaign. This year, at the Festival of Dignified Rage that was held in Zapatista territory, they showed a video from this group.

Yes, the Movement for Justice in El Barrio. You went to Mexico for this meeting?

Yes. This appears to me the correct way of building power.

Well, there have been criticisms on the Mexican left that the Zapatistas' ethic of refusing to participate in elections has allowed the right to win.

Yes, but all the parties are trying to trick the people. Elections are not the way to build power. The communities in the Sierra that are confronting the mining companies, and the peoples in the Amazon who are standing up to the oil companies-they are building power, like the Zapatistas.

You said last night that in the '60s you were struggling for a more just society, but today it is a more grave issue-the survival of the human race.

That's right. The *amazonicos* are struggling against global warming. If you ask them, they will say they are struggling to defend their territories. But in effect, they are struggling against global warming too. Indigenous peoples have been fighting for eco-socialism for 500 years.

Other Socialist Voice articles by Hugo Blanco:

- Hugo Blanco on the Indigenous Struggle in Amazonia
- Support the Indigenous Struggle in Peru
- A Triumphant Advance in Ecuador
- The Epic Struggle of Indigenous Andean-Amazonian Culture
- The "Indian Problem" in Peru: From Mariategui to Today
- Chile: The Lesson That Venezuela Learned?

Socialist Voice #365, October 13, 2009

CBC 'disappears' Venezuela and Haiti coups

An Open Letter to 'The Current,' the weekday morning newsmagazine of the CBC, Canada's state radio broadcaster

by **Roger Annis**

October 8, 2009

I listened with interest today to your interview with Peter Kent, Canada's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (the Americas) on the subject of Honduras.

Your host repeated a phrase uttered two days ago during her interview with Jorge Heine of the Center for International Governance Innovation of Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, that the June 29 military coup d'état in Honduras was "the first military coup in Latin America in 20 years."

The phrase is erroneous on at least two counts. There was a military coup d'état in Venezuela on April 11, 2002 that ousted the elected President Hugo Chavez. Fortunately, that coup lasted only two days. A popular uprising in support of Chavez combined with support for him among the ranks of the Venezuela army quickly sent the coupmakers packing.

There have been two coups d'état within the past 20 years in Haiti, both directed at the elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. One took place in 1991, the other in 2004. Both resulted in thousands of deaths, jailings and exiles of supporters of the elected president at the hands of the coupmakers. To this day, President Aristide lives in exile as a result of the 2004 coup.

Further on Haiti, perhaps your host's use of the phrase in question results from a belief that Haiti does not form part of "Latin America," either because it is not Spanish speaking or because the "Caribbean" region of which Haiti forms part cannot be considered a part of "Latin America." This is wrong on three counts.

One, progressive opinion in South America and the Caribbean understands the phrase "Latin America" as encompassing all the territory lying south of the Rio Grande River. So, too, does institutional opinion – the Organization of American States (OAS) makes no distinction in its membership eligibility between countries of the Caribbean and those of continental South America.

Two, there are very close historical, ethnic and economic ties between the countries of the Caribbean and South America. Continental countries with a Caribbean shoreline, such as Mexico, Honduras and Venezuela, to name only a few, are as much Caribbean as they are South American in their historical and present ties. Any attempt to create artificial divisions between the continental and island countries of this region ignore its history and are therefore arbitrary.

Thirdly, the designation "Latin America" as synonymous with "Spanish speaking" defies the geography of the region. Guyana and Belize are continental countries that speak English; Brazilians speak Portuguese; Cuba and Dominican Republic are island countries that speak

Spanish. Island countries of the Caribbean speak many languages, including English, Spanish, French, Haitian Kreyol, French Kreyol, and Dutch. They form a part of the whole to which history, admittedly haphazardly, has bequeathed the designation "Latin America."

One detects an element of historical whitewashing behind the effort to write Haiti out of the region in which it and its future lies. Is the claim of "no coups in the past 20 years in Latin America" an effort to ignore the disastrous consequences of the two military coups in Haiti during these same years, including the coup of 2004 in which the Canadian military played a direct and shameful role? Many NGO's and think tanks in Canada and abroad have material and ideological interests in promoting such whitewashing. I hope that in future *The Current* will not allow this to pass.

One way to set to the record straight would be to revisit the events of 1991 and 2004 in Haiti. The parallels with Honduras, including the present efforts of Canada and other OAS powers to set conditions for the return of the elected President Zelaya, are disturbing and invite further investigation.

Sincerely,
Roger Annis

Socialist Voice #366, October 13, 2009

Honduras: 'Nothing will be the same again'

by **Federico Fuentes**

What began as a coup aimed at deposing a millionaire landowner president, whose "crime" had been to gradually shift Honduras away from U.S. control and implement mild pro-people reforms, has spurred on a mass resistance movement with the potential to revolutionize the country.

Roberto Micheletti, installed as president after the military overthrew the elected government of President Manuel Zelaya on June 28, told the September 30 Argentine daily *Clarín*: "We removed Zelaya because he was a leftist ... This worried us."

However, more than 100 days since Zelaya was kidnapped at gunpoint and exiled to Costa Rica, Micheletti has even more to worry about.

Zelaya is back in the country, in the confines of the Brazilian embassy, and there is a mobilised population demanding more than just their president restored.

The ongoing peaceful protests, strikes and blockades have continued in the face of increasingly severe repression. The Honduras Resists website said, as of October 2, that at least 4,000 people had been detained and 17 killed, although many anti-coup activists believe the real number to be much higher

There are a number of reports of torture at the hands of the security forces.

The Committee in Defence of Human Rights in Honduras (CODEH) said more than 100 people have been injured by police using chains, wooden bats and other objects. CODEH also said more than 105 "homicides" had been officially registered during the coup-imposed curfew periods.

On October 9, Radio Globo said that snipers had begun firing into the Brazilian embassy, home to Zelaya and hundreds of his supporters. The Associated Press said the same day that right-wing Colombian paramilitaries, infamous for human rights abuses, were arriving in Honduras.

Resistance

Gilberto Rios, a leader of the National Resistance Front Against the Coup (FNRG), told *Green Left Weekly* over the phone from the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa: "The resistance is standing firm and united, and is determined to go all the way in order to liberate Honduras."

The FNRG unites left organisations, trade unions, teachers, peasant groups and popular organisations. It also includes the anti-coup wing of the Liberal party, one of the traditional parties of the Honduran political system to which both Zelaya and Micheletti belong.

Rios said: "It is clear that the opposition to this coup is class-based. The upper classes, in their majority, are with the coup. But they are the minority of the population.

"The lower classes are the majority – more than 65% of the population lives in poverty – and are identified with the resistance to the coup."

The key demands of the resistance are for the restoration of Zelaya as president and a constituent assembly to draft a new, democratic constitution.

The FNRG has led the daily demonstrations by workers, peasants and other popular sectors. It has developed into a powerful social force for change, involving an estimated 100,000 activists.

Through this process of intense class struggle, thousands of new grassroots leaders have arisen throughout the *barrios* and *colonias* (poor neighbourhoods) of Tegucigalpa, and across the country.

The strategy of combining mass demonstrations in the centre of Tegucigalpa with protests in the poor neighbourhoods has ensured that the message of the resistance has reached deep into the population.

It has also opened space for protests in the barrios, many of which have declared themselves “liberated zones”, away from the heavy repression in the city centre.

There have been nightly street battles as police try to move in, repress protests and arrest resistance leaders. But this has only created more local leaders who are leading the fight back.

Rios noted: “When the police come to repress [the popular sectors] in their own homes, including those that haven’t been involved, they have seen the need to involve themselves in the resistance.”

Rios said: “There are other sectors of the middle class that bit by bit have incorporated themselves [into the resistance] ... as well as small and medium business owners who have gone broke due to the absurd measures of the totalitarian regime.”

Elections and dialogue

The resistance has caused a severe crisis for the coup regime and its supporters, with the economy losing tens of millions of dollars a day.

The desperate regime, which is showing increasing signs of internal disarray, is seeking to cling on until the general elections scheduled for November 29. The regime hopes the poll will gain it some legitimacy and break its international isolation by giving it a “democratic” face.

On September 28, Micheletti decreed a 45-day state of siege, suspending constitutional liberties and banning gatherings of more than 20 people.

The regime sent in the military to shut down the only two media outlets that supported the anti-coup resistance.

Behind this public display of strength, the regime is in trouble.

One sign is the regime’s decision to end the school term almost a month before its officially set date and before the scheduled November 29 elections. The teachers’ union has been one of the key forces within the resistance, organising regular general strikes.

Pressure is building within the coup regime to find a safe exit strategy. This is shown by the call by business leaders for a negotiated solution and opposition from the Congress to the state of siege. Both sectors were crucial backers of the coup.

The forces of repression, in particular the U.S.-trained elite military force, remain solidly behind the regime.

Several attempts have been made to establish a dialog between the regime and Zelaya, who, like the FNRG, is insisting his restoration is essential to any negotiations. Zelaya has appointed five FNRG representatives to his negotiating team.

The latest attempt at dialogue involved a delegation from the Organisation of American States. The delegation's aim is to win support for the San Jose Accord, a compromise document that restores Zelaya but creates a power-sharing arrangement and grants the coup leaders immunity for their crimes.

The central concern of the U.S. government, which is helping prop up the coup regime while publicly pushing the accord, is to demobilize the masses and find an orderly way out of the crisis.

Brazil, which has been thrust onto centre stage in the dispute since Zelaya arrived at their embassy in Tegucigalpa on September 21, has said the solution is for Micheletti to step down and Zelaya be restored so genuinely free elections can occur.

In response, Micheletti said on October 7 for the first time that he would be willing to step down but only if he was replaced by a third person – not Zelaya.

“Elections will occur on November 29,” Micheletti insisted, unless someone “attacks or invades us”.

Fight for power

That same day, Zelaya issued a public statement saying that any election would lack all legitimacy if he was restored as president but repression continued and pro-resistance media outlets remained closed.

He said that if he was not restored before October 15, the elections would lack any credibility or legitimacy.

The FNRG said on October 7 that it could not be part of any dialogue while the coup regime assassinated resistance activists, closed down alternative media outlets, and refused to implement the decree passed under pressure to lift the state of siege.

For the FNRG, “the unconditional restitution of [Zelaya] is non-negotiable ... Similarly, we cannot negotiate our firm demand that all the coup plotters be tried and punished, and that a democratic, inclusive and participatory National Constituent Assembly be organised.”

Within the FNRG, the coup and repression is sparking discussion over the need for the constituent assembly to transform the military.

Another crucial discussion is the possibility of transforming the FNRG into a political force, particularly given the possible upcoming election. The resistance will only take part in a vote if Zelaya is restored beforehand. It is calling for a boycott of any poll organised by the coup regime.

There is growing momentum for a united candidate of the resistance, which polls indicate would have a very strong chance of winning elections.

Juan Barahona, a central FNRG leader, explained in an interview posted on socialist journal *Links*: “If we participate or not [in the elections] is a question of [the coup regime] accepting certain conditions and with Zelaya [returned to] power ...

“The future is ours, nothing will ever be the same in Honduras. The dispute for power is posed now and will continue to be posed afterwards. The resistance has the conditions to organise a political-social organisation to fight for power.”

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Socialist Voice #367, October 25, 2009

The Caribbean and Latin America at the Rendezvous of History

by Melanie Newton

In 2004 two events sent shock waves across the Caribbean Sea, presenting us with two radically different blueprints for future hemispheric relations.

In February a combined force of American, Canadian and French troops slipped into Haiti in the dead of night, “convinced” President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to resign, and spirited him out of the country into exile. Over the past five years the United Nations has occupied Haiti, ostensibly helping to build democracy, but, in reality, crushing democratic opposition movements. In a historic turn of events, Brazil, which has emerged in recent years as a regional superpower, has led UN forces in Haiti since 2005.

Meanwhile, in December 2004, the governments of Venezuela and Cuba spearheaded the Bolivarian People’s Alternative (now the Bolivarian Alliance, or ALBA). ALBA has sought a new kind of relationship between independent Caribbean and Latin American states. Several islands have joined ALBA, attracted by Hugo Chavez’s apparent willingness to use his country’s oil wealth as the lubricant for a new kind of regional politics. ALBA’s concept of trade and development seems to be based on the advancement of social justice and human well-being, rather than the expansion of free trade and global capital. Chavez’s commitment to solidarity with the non-Hispanic Caribbean seems to be reflected in his vocal opposition to the Brazil-led UN mission in Haiti. Most other continental Latin American governments are either contributors to the Brazil-led occupation force or have greeted the coup and the subsequent occupation with silence. This is in stark contrast with most of Latin America’s outspoken opposition to the military coup in Honduras and their support for ousted Honduran president Manuel Zelaya.

The occupation of Haiti and the Bolivarian Alliance open a new window on to the historical landscape of the Caribbean and continental America. To understand the deeper significance of recent events we must go back 200 years, to early 19th century Haiti. In spring 1806 Francisco de Miranda – a man second in importance only to *Símon Bolívar* in the history of Latin American independence – arrived in Haiti, seeking support for an uprising against Spain. In Haiti he procured ships and found time to sketch the national flag of the future republic of Venezuela. The new flag was first hoisted in the Haitian city of Jacmel on March 12, 1806, a date still celebrated as “National Flag Day” in Venezuela.

The Haiti of Miranda’s day was only the second independent state in the Americas after the United States, and the first nation to abolish slavery. In an age dominated by slaveholding and colonising powers, Haiti’s revolutionaries had the audacity to reject both slavery and French imperial rule. The Haitian revolutionary army was one of the most effective military forces the world had seen, defeating Spain, Britain and Napoleon’s France within the space of a decade. After declaring independence in 1804, Haiti’s emperor, a former slave named Jean-Jacques Dessalines whose back bore scars from whippings he had endured as a slave, declared Haiti a

black republic and committed Haiti to an anti-slavery foreign policy in the Americas. On Christmas Eve 1815, Simón Bolívar, the future “Great Liberator” himself, sailed into the Haitian city of Les Cayes as a political refugee. The President of Haiti’s southern Republic, Alexandre Pétion, gave the stranded Bolívar political asylum, as well as military and financial support and a printing press (a very important element of any 19th century revolution). Pétion had one condition: Bolívar had to make slave emancipation in Spanish America an immediate priority. Pétion saw in the “Bolivarian Dream” of an independent Latin America a chance to end Haiti’s crippling international isolation. Slaveholding powers were determined to see the Haitian experiment in black freedom and independence fail, because Haitian success spelled the end for slavery. The United States did not recognize Haiti until 1862, and France, the former colonial ruler, only accepted Haiti’s independence after Haiti agreed to pay the equivalent of \$2.4 billion US as “indemnification” for the loss of French property (most of it property in human beings).

Bolívar had already freed his own slaves but it was Pétion who convinced him to make general emancipation a central revolutionary goal, and Pétion’s support proved crucial to Bolívar’s success. To some degree Bolívar kept his promise to Pétion, promulgating a constitution in 1827 which denounced slavery as an outrage against justice and humanity. Ultimately, however Bolívar’s anti-slavery impulses could not keep pace with his commitment to a united Latin America. Time and again, Bolívar compromised with Latin American slaveholding elites in order to secure their support, allowing slavery to continue. Bolívar was even less committed to Haiti than he was to abolition. Under pressure from the United States, Bolívar did not even invite Haiti to the 1826 Congress of Panama, the first hemispheric meeting of independent states. Incidentally, Brazil and the United States, the hemisphere’s two biggest independent slaveholding nations, were both invited.

Despite his genuine admiration for Pétion and the key role of black soldiers in the continental wars of independence, it seems Bolívar had little time for black people. Bolívar’s limited willingness to acknowledge his movement’s debt to either Haiti or to Afro-Latin Americans is one source of modern Latin American elites’ inability to come to terms with their own history of slavery and racial inequality. The “indemnification” payment to France and Haiti’s exclusion from the Panama Congress burdened Haiti with a terrible debt and confirmed Haiti’s diplomatic isolation. The freedom for which so many of Haiti’s people died, was tragically undermined, and subsequent generations of Haitians have paid the price.

As we face the current crisis in Haiti and ALBA’s effort to forge a new regional solidarity, we can choose what lessons we draw from this history. We must come to terms with the fact that our own internalized racism – not just the racism emanating from Northern countries – has limited our chances for a better collective future. Nevertheless, in the story of Pétion and Bolívar, we can also choose to see the glimmer of tremendous, as yet unrealized human potential and possibility. Bolívar made a choice not to take the high road and embrace Haiti’s revolutionary blackness, but the road is not closed to us forever. We do not have to be victims of our past, doomed to repeat its mistakes for all eternity.

The answers to the Caribbean and Latin America’s present dilemmas lie in our own histories of struggle, survival and unfinished revolutions. The life and ideas of another heir to the legacy of

the Haitian Revolution can perhaps offer us a constructive way of charting a better, common Caribbean and Latin American future. Born in Martinique, Frantz Fanon became the international spokesperson for the Algerian National Liberation Front in its battle against French rule. Like the Haitian revolutionaries of long ago, he was his generation's most scathing critic of imperialism and racism in general, and French colonialism in particular. Through his own life and his writings, Fanon taught the world that true political solidarity is not based on supposed cultural or ethnic sameness, but rather a leap of faith, a willingness to see alliances with and between the most dispossessed and degraded people as the root of social transformation. Lasting changes begin when we acknowledge the burden of past error, and confront and commit ourselves to working through differences, real or imagined. The ghosts of Bolívar, Pétion and Fanon, along with the hundreds of thousands of black and indigenous Caribbean and Latin American revolutionaries who died for this more democratic vision, wait to see which path we choose.

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Socialist Voice #368, October 25, 2009

Revolutionaries and Broad Left Parties

A LeftViews article, by Phil Hearse

LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion. Phil Hearse is a member of Socialist Resistance, which recently became the British section of the Fourth International. This is excerpted from a discussion article he wrote in 2007.

Since the beginning of the decade important steps have been made in rebuilding the left internationally, following the working class defeats of the '80s and '90s and the negative impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Starting with the demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle at the end of 1999, an important global justice movement emerged, which fed directly into the building of a massive anti-war movement that internationally dwarfed the anti-Vietnam war movement in the 1960s. These processes breathed fresh life into the left, as could be seen already at the Florence European Social Movement in 2002 where the presence of the Rifondazione Comunista and the tendencies of the far left was everywhere. In addition, the massive rebirth of the left and socialism in Latin America has fuelled these processes.

However unlike the regrowth and redefinition of the left symbolised by the years 1956 and 1968, in the first decade of the 21st century things were much more difficult objectively, with the working class mainly on the defensive. Multiple debates on orientation and strategy have started to sweep the international left, leading to a reconfiguration of the socialist movement in several countries.

Positive aspects of this process include historic events in Venezuela and Bolivia (with all their problems), the emergence of Die Linke – the Left party – in Germany, the Left Bloc in Portugal and indeed new left formations in many countries.

In other countries the left redefinitions have been decidedly mixed. For example the Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) went out of the Communist Refoundation in Italy, over the fundamental question of the latter's support for Italian participation in the Afghanistan war. In Brazil a militant minority walked out of the Workers Party (PT) to found the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), over the central question of the Lula government's application of a neoliberal policy which made a mockery of the name of the party.

These splits, for sure, represented a political clarification and an attempt to rescue and defend principled class struggle politics. But the evolution of the majority in both the PT and Communist Refoundation are of course massive defeats for the left.

So, in many countries debates are opening up about what kind of left we need in the 21st century. This is of course normal; each successive stage of the international class struggle, especially after world historic events of the type we have seen after 25 years of neoliberalism, poses the issue of socialist organisation anew.

It is absurd to imagine that it is possible to take off the shelf wholesale texts written in Russia in 1902 or even 1917, and apply them in an unmediated way in 2007.

Even less credible is the idea of taking the form of revolutionary organisation and politics appropriate for Minneapolis in 1937 and simply attempting to extrapolate it in a situation where revolutionary politics has been transformed by central new issues (of gender and the environment in particular); where the working class itself has been transformed in terms of its cultural level, geographical distribution and political and trade union organisation; and where the experience of mass social movements and the balance sheet of Stalinism (and social democracy) has radically reaffirmed the centrality of self-organisation and democracy at the heart of the revolutionary project.

Revolutionary Socialism and ‘broad left parties’

As noted above, the experience of building broad left parties internationally has been decidedly mixed; in some cases they have slid to the right and ended up supporting neoliberal governments.

For some on the revolutionary left, what we might call the ‘clean hands and spotless banner’ tendency, this shows that attempts at political recomposition are a waste of time. Far better to just build your organisation, sell your paper, hold your meetings, criticise everyone else and maintain your own spotless banner.

But underlying this simplistic approach is actually a deeply spontaneist conception of the revolutionary process. This generally takes the form of the idea that “under the pressure of events”, and after the revolutionary party has been “built”, the revolutionary party will finally links up with big sections of the working class. With this comforting idea under our belts we can be happy to be a very small (but well organised) minority and be sanguine about the strength of the right and indeed the far right.

In our view this simplistic “build the party” option is no longer operable; indeed it is irresponsible because it inevitably leaves the national political arena the exclusive terrain of the right. In the era of neoliberalism, without a mass base for revolutionary politics but with a huge base for militant opposition to the right, it seems to us self-evident the left has to get together, to organise its forces, to win new forces away from the social-liberal centre left, to contest elections and to raise the voice of an alternative in national politics.

This is what has been so important about Die Linke, the Left Bloc, the Danish Red-Green Alliance and many others. This was the importance of the Workers Party in Brazil and the Communist Refoundation in Italy at their height: that they articulated a significant national voice against neoliberalism that would have been impossible for the small forces of the revolutionary left.

More than that: the very existence of these forces, at various stages, had an important impact on mass mobilisations and struggles – as for example Communist Refoundation did on mobilising the anti-war movement and the struggle against pension reform in Italy.

The existence of a mass political alternative raises people’s horizons, remoralises them, brings socialism back onto political agendas, erects an obstacle to the domination of political discourses

by different brands of neoliberalism and promotes the struggle. It also acts as a clearing house of political ideas in which the revolutionaries put their positions.

So with a broad left formation in existence everyone is a winner – *not!* No broad left formation has been problem free. For revolutionaries these are usually coalitions with forces to their political right. They are generally centres of permanent political debate and disagreement, and they pose major questions of political functioning for revolutionary forces, especially those used to a strong propaganda routine. They inevitably involve compromises and difficult judgements about where to draw political divides.

What an orientation towards political regroupment of the left does not involve is a fetishisation of a particular political structure, or the idea that broad left parties are the new form of revolutionary party, or the notion that these parties will necessarily last for decades.

For us they are interim and transitional forms of organisation (but see the qualification of this below). Our goal remains that of building revolutionary parties. It's just that, as against the 'clean hands and spotless banner' tendency, we have a major disagreement about what revolutionary parties, in the 21st century, will look like – and how to build them.

The functioning of revolutionaries in broad left parties

Broad left parties (or alliances) are not united fronts around specific questions, but political blocs. For them to develop and keep their unity, they have to function according to basic democratic rules. However this cannot be reduced to the simplistic notion that there are votes and the majority rules. This leaves out of account the anomalies and anti-democratic practices which the existence of organised revolutionary currents can give rise to if they operate in a factional way. On this we would advance the following general guidelines:

Inside broad left formations there has to be a real, autonomous political life in which people who are not members of an organised current can have confidence that decisions are not being made behind their backs in a disciplined caucus that will impose its views – they have to be confident that their political contribution can affect political debates.

This means that no revolutionary current can have the 'disciplined Phalanx' concept of operation. Except in the case of the degeneration of a broad left current (as in Brazil) we are not doing entry work or fighting a bureaucratic leadership. This means in most debates, most of the time, members of political currents should have the right to express their own viewpoint irrespective of the majority view in their own current. If this doesn't happen the real balance of opinion is obscured and democracy negated.

Evidently this shouldn't be the case on decisive questions of the interest of the working class and oppressed – like sending troops to Afghanistan. But if there are differences on issues like that, then membership of a revolutionary current is put in question.

Revolutionary tendencies should avoid like the plague attempts to use their organisational weight to impose decisions against everyone else. That's a disastrous mode of operation in which democracy is a fake. If a revolutionary tendency can't win its opinions in open and democratic debate, unless it involves fundamental questions of the interest of the working class and

oppressed, compromises and concessions have to be made. Democracy is a fake if a revolutionary current says ‘debate is OK, and we’ll pack meetings to ensure we win it.’

Revolutionaries – individuals and currents – have to demonstrate their commitment and loyalty to the broad left formation of which they are a part. That means prioritising the activities and press of the broad formation itself. Half in, half out, doesn’t work.

We should put no a priori limits on the evolution of a broad left formation. Its evolution will be determined by how it responds to the major questions in the fight against imperialism and neoliberal capitalism, not by putting a 1930s label on it (like ‘centrism’).

The example of the PSoL in Brazil shows it is perfectly possible to function as a broad socialist party with several organised militant socialist currents within it. The precondition of giving organised currents the right to operate within a broad party is that they do not circumvent the rights of the members who are not members of organised currents.

Opposed conceptions of the left

There is a false conception of the configuration of the workers movement and the left, a misreading of ideas from the 1930s, that is common in some sections of the Trotskyist movement. This ‘map’ sees basically the working class and its trade unions, the reformists (Stalinists), various forms of ‘centrism’ (tendencies which vacillate between reform and revolution) and the revolutionary marxists – with maybe the anarchists as a complicating factor. On the basis of this kind of map, Trotsky could say in 1938, “There is no revolutionary tendency worthy of the name on the face of the earth outside the Fourth.”

If this idea was ever operable, it is certainly not today. The forms of the emergence of mass anti-capitalism and rejection of Stalinism and social democracy has thrown up a cacophony of social movements and social justice organisations, as well as a huge array of militant left political forces internationally.

This poses new and complex tasks of organising and cohering the anti-capitalist left. And this cannot be done by building a small international current that regards itself as the unique depository of Marxist truth and regards itself as capable of giving the correct answer on every question, in every part of the planet.

The self definition of the Fourth International and Socialist resistance is very different to that. We have our own ideas and political traditions, some of which we see as essential. But we want to help refound the left, together with others, incorporating the decisive lessons of feminism and environmentalism, in a dialogue with other anti-capitalists and militant leftists. One that doesn’t start by assuming that we are correct about everything, all-knowing and have nothing to learn, especially from crucial new revolutionary experiences like the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela.

Today the ‘thin red line of Bolshevism’ conception of revolutionary politics doesn’t work. This idea often prioritises formal programmatic agreement, sometimes on arcane or secondary questions, above the realities of organisation and class struggle on the ground. And it systematically leads to artificially counterposing yourself to every other force on the left.