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Socialist Voice #403, February 1, 2010

Montréal Activists Plan People's Summit Against War and Militarism

By Richard Fidler

The Montréal-based antiwar collective Échec à la guerre (which translates roughly as “Stop war”) is organizing a *People's Summit Against War and Militarism* to be held March 19-21 in that city.

Featuring workshops and panels as well as a plenary session that will issue a Joint Declaration, the People's Summit promises to be an important step in creating an understanding of the underlying issues that alone can sustain and build an ongoing movement against war and imperialism in this country.

This is not the first major initiative of this type by Échec à la guerre — which, in the months leading up to the Iraq war, organized massive demonstrations in Quebec including the march in Montréal of nearly a quarter million people, the largest antiwar demonstration in Canadian history. In February 2008 the collective held Public hearings for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan, and in October 2008 it sponsored publication of an Open Letter to federal election candidates under the heading *Sur le retrait des troupes canadiennes de*

l’Afghanistan, la démocratie c’est pour quand? (When will we have a democratic decision on the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan?).

The call-out for the People’s Summit explains:

The purpose of the Summit is to strengthen the movement against war and militarism in Québec by deepening its reflection, clarifying its demands and consolidating its unity in action. It is urgent to do so. As the war of occupation in Afghanistan runs into more and more resistance and is now spilling over into Pakistan, the voices in favour of extending Canada’s military intervention in the region are already starting to be heard.

In this context, the period of preparations for the Summit and the Summit itself will offer a space and tools for further deconstructing the warmongers’ rhetoric and arguments. Canada’s role in the occupation of Afghanistan, a pamphlet in 18 talking points put out by Collectif Échec à la guerre, is still very pertinent. But although opposed to the war in Afghanistan, many Quebecers may feel at a loss when faced with some of the arguments put forward in militarist propaganda, such as:

- “It’s a UN mission”;
- “We have to honour our NATO commitments”;
- “Immediate withdrawal would be irresponsible.”

Countering such arguments requires a more thorough examination of important topics on which people often don’t have much information: the UN, NATO and issues of war and peace in our times. A shared understanding of these major issues becomes a necessity for the citizen-based anti-war movement if it wants to help transform the majority opinion against the war into a force capable of obtaining the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan and questioning the alignment of Canada’s foreign policy on that of the U.S. empire.

And the call-out adds:

It goes without saying that these objectives are in no way specific to the Québec context, and the Collectif Échec à la guerre will work in close collaboration with the Canadian Peace Alliance and its member groups to hold similar summits in other cities across Canada.

As part of the preparation for the People’s Summit, the collective has published three downloadable pamphlets discussing the major topics to be addressed at the Summit. The first two were issued in June 2009. One, entitled (in translation) “NATO: Defensive Alliance or Instrument of War?”, outlines the alliance’s origins in the Cold War and its evolution since 1991 as a keystone in imperialist foreign policy. The other, the title of which could be translated as “Are They Making War on Behalf of Women?”, exposes the faux-feminist rationale frequently peddled in defense of the Canadian and NATO war on Afghanistan. It makes effective use of quotations from Ms. Malalai Joya, the Afghan antiwar MP who recently toured North America.

Canada's corporate-military linkages

Last month, the collective published a third pamphlet, *La militarisation de la politique étrangère du Canada: qui dicte l'agenda?* (*MPEC* – “The Militarization of Canada’s Foreign Policy: Who Dictates the Agenda?”) A fourth pamphlet, yet to be published, will analyze the role of the UN Security Council and international law.

MPEC makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of Canadian foreign policy since the Second World War. It describes Canada’s central role as a close partner of the United States in the founding of NATO in 1949 and how the alliance provided the framework for Canada’s intervention in the Korean civil war in the early 1950s, the occupation of Germany, and this country’s production, sale and research and development of weapons throughout the Cold War. Since the Cold War, it explains, NATO has expanded its role as an instrument for Washington to secure its global hegemony amidst increasing inter-capitalist rivalry for resources and markets.

The pamphlet outlines the corresponding militarist shift in Canada’s foreign policy in the post-Cold War period, tracing its evolution through the build-up of the Canadian military as a “true combat force” participating in the 1991 Gulf War, the naval blockade of Iraq between 1990 and 2003, the army’s intervention in Somalia in 1992-93, the air force participation in the 78-day NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, and of course most recently in the now almost decade-long intervention in Afghanistan. It analyzes this shift in the context of the increasing trade and investment linkages with Washington through “free trade” and investment blocs and the related repressive measures in the post-9/11 period as expressed in the *Anti-Terrorism Act* (modeled on the U.S. *Patriot Act*), the security certificate detentions, the Security and Prosperity Partnership, and of course the massive increases in military expenditures.

Finally, *MPEC* documents the leading role of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) in promoting the deepening alignment of Canadian foreign and military policy with that of the United States. The CCCE includes the country’s major business executives, including the heads of the banks, oil companies and military producers — among them such leading stalwarts of “Québec Inc.” as Bombardier, SNC-Lavalin, Power Corporation and CAE. It is now headed by John Manley, the former deputy prime minister. In short, Canada’s ruling class. *MPEC* notes: “A comparison of the CCCE’s positions since 2001 with the Canadian government’s foreign policy and defence statements reveals a troubling fact: they often contain the same ideas, the same arguments, sometimes even word for word....”

Peacekeeping?

There are some weaknesses in the pamphlet, in my view. In its discussion of Canadian policy in the Cold War, it unduly emphasizes Ottawa’s “differences” with Washington, citing such examples as the refusal to deploy nuclear arms on Canadian soil, the maintaining of economic (and diplomatic) links with Cuba, and the welcome accorded to U.S. draft resisters and deserters during the Vietnam war. A further examination would reveal that these examples had their limitations; they were exceptions, not the rule, and often served as cover for more nefarious practices.

Canada partnered with the U.S. in the North American Air Defence Alliance and allowed the U.S. to establish air bases on Canadian territory. It even built two nuclear missile bases of its own north of Toronto and Montréal-Ottawa, but then declined to equip the Bomarc missiles with nuclear arms — a decision Lester “Peace Prize” Pearson campaigned against as leader of the Liberal Party.

Although it did not send troops to Vietnam, Canada covered for U.S. aggression through its membership in the International Control Commission, while (as MPEC acknowledges) selling hundreds of millions of dollars in weapons annually to the U.S. throughout the war. The influx of young educated Americans fleeing the war helped temporarily to reverse the Canadian “brain drain” to the U.S. during a period when this country was rapidly expanding its post-secondary education facilities.

More seriously, *MPEC* fails to note how Canadian participation in “peacekeeping” forces under UN auspices, which it lauds as an example of Canada’s “mediation role”, was actually part and parcel of its alignment with the U.S. and other imperialist powers, often in opposition to the national liberation struggles that the pamphlet correctly cites as an important feature of the post-WWII world.

In fact, Pearson’s role in establishing UN peacekeeping (for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize) was part of an attempt on Washington’s behalf to extricate its NATO allies Britain and France, along with Israel, from the consequences in the Arab world of their attack on Egypt in the wake of its nationalization of the Suez Canal.

The more recent “peacekeeping” operations in Somalia, the Balkans and, yes, Afghanistan (which the UN has ex post facto endorsed) are likewise motivated by pro-imperialist considerations, now in the post-Cold War context of a less fettered scope for imperialist aggression in the dependent nations.

This omission is especially regrettable in light of Canada’s ongoing “peacekeeping” effort in Haiti, the second largest recipient (after Afghanistan) of Ottawa’s “foreign aid”. In 2004 the Canadian military participated in the overthrow and kidnapping of the country’s elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and since then the RCMP have been heavily involved in training police and security forces in Haiti. Canada’s response to the recent earthquake was primarily military, sending up to 2,000 soldiers to Haiti to patrol the streets of Port au Prince while Haitians frantically searched the ruins for loved ones and neighbours. Ottawa now has as many troops in Haiti as it does in Afghanistan! Yet Haiti is not even mentioned in this pamphlet.

However, these are the kind of questions that can be discussed at the forthcoming People’s Summit. The MPEC pamphlet concludes with a call for a public debate and redefinition of Canada’s foreign policy, and in particular for “the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan.” The Summit is an important initiative by Échec à la guerre that deserves the support of all antiwar activists, and not only in Quebec.

Richard Fidler is a Socialist Voice Contributing Editor. This article first appeared in his blog, Life on the Left.

Socialist Voice #404, February 1, 2010

How the West Kidnapped Haiti

by John Pilger

(*Green Left Weekly* 29 January 2010)

The theft of Haiti has been swift and crude. On January 22, the United States secured “formal approval” from the United Nations to take over all air and sea ports in Haiti, and to “secure” roads. No Haitian signed the agreement, which has no basis in law.

Power rules in a US naval blockade and the arrival of 13,000 marines, special forces, spooks and mercenaries, none with humanitarian relief training.

The airport in the capital, Port-au-Prince, is now a US military base and relief flights have been rerouted to the Dominican Republic. All flights stopped for three hours for the arrival of Hillary Clinton. Critically injured Haitians waited unaided as 800 American residents in Haiti were fed, watered and evacuated. Six days passed before the US air force dropped bottled water to people suffering dehydration.

The first TV reports played a critical role, giving the impression of widespread criminal mayhem. Matt Frei, the BBC reporter despatched from Washington, seemed on the point of hyperventilating as he brayed about the “violence” and need for “security.”

In spite of the demonstrable dignity of the earthquake victims, and evidence of citizens’ groups toiling unaided to rescue people, and even a US general’s assessment that the violence in Haiti was considerably less than before the earthquake, Frei claimed that “looting is the only industry” and “the dignity of Haiti’s past is long forgotten.”

Thus, a history of unerring US violence and exploitation in Haiti was consigned to the victims. “There’s no doubt”, reported Frei in the aftermath of America’s bloody invasion of Iraq in 2003, “that the desire to bring good, to bring American values to the rest of the world, and especially now to the Middle East … is now increasingly tied up with military power.”

In a sense, he was right. Never before in so-called peacetime have human relations been as militarised by rapacious power. Never before has an American president subordinated his government to the military establishment of his discredited predecessor, as Barack Obama has done.

In pursuing George W Bush’s policy of war and domination, Obama has sought from Congress an unprecedented military budget in excess of \$700 billion. He has become, in effect, the spokesman for a military coup.

For the people of Haiti the implications are clear, if grotesque. With US troops in control of their country, Obama has appointed Bush to the “relief effort”: a parody lifted from Graham Greene’s *The Comedians*, set in Papa Doc’s Haiti.

Bush’s relief effort following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 amounted to an ethnic cleansing of many of New Orleans’s black population. In 2004, he ordered the kidnapping of the democratically elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and exiled him to Africa.

The popular Aristide had had the temerity to legislate modest reforms, such as a minimum wage for those who toil in Haiti's sweatshops.

When I was last in Haiti, I watched very young girls stooped in front of whirring, hissing binding machines at the Superior baseball plant in Port-au-Prince. Many had swollen eyes and lacerated arms. I produced a camera and was thrown out. Haiti is where America makes the equipment for its hallowed national game, for next to nothing.

Haiti is where Walt Disney contractors make Mickey Mouse pyjamas, for next to nothing. The US controls Haiti's sugar, bauxite and sisal. Rice-growing was replaced by imported American rice, driving people into the town and jerry-built housing.

Year after year, Haiti was invaded by US marines, infamous for atrocities that have been their speciality from the Philippines to Afghanistan.

Bill Clinton is another comedian, having got himself appointed the UN's man in Haiti. Once fawned upon by the BBC as "Mr Nice Guy ... bringing democracy back to a sad and troubled land," Clinton is Haiti's most notorious privateer, demanding deregulation that benefits the sweatshop barons. Lately, he has been promoting a \$55m deal to turn the north of Haiti into an American-annexed "tourist playground".

Not for tourists is the US building its fifth-biggest embassy. Oil was found in Haiti's waters decades ago and the US has kept it in reserve until the Middle East begins to run dry.

More urgently, an occupied Haiti has a strategic importance in Washington's "rollback" plans for Latin America. The goal is the overthrow of the popular democracies in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, control of Venezuela's abundant petroleum reserves, and sabotage of the growing regional co-operation long denied by US-sponsored regimes.

The first rollback success came last year with the coup against the Honduran president Jose Manuel Zelaya, who also dared advocate a minimum wage and that the rich pay tax.

Obama's secret support for the illegal regime in Honduras carries a clear warning to vulnerable governments in central America. Last October, the regime in Colombia, long bankrolled by Washington and supported by death squads, handed the Americans seven military bases to "combat anti-US governments in the region."

Media propaganda has laid the ground for what may well be Obama's next war. In December, researchers at the University of the West of England published first findings of a 10-year study of BBC reporting on Venezuela. Of 304 BBC reports, only three mentioned any of the historic reforms of Hugo Chavez's government, while most denigrated his extraordinary democratic record, at one point comparing him to Hitler.

Such distortion and servitude to Western power are rife across the Anglo-American media. People who struggle for a better life, or for life itself, from Venezuela to Honduras to Haiti, deserve our support.

Socialist Voice #405, February 5, 2010

Olympic Flame Parades Through Ravaged Northern British Columbia

by Roger Annis

The Vancouver Winter Olympic torch relay is winding its way across northern British Columbia this week. It arrived in the coastal town of Kitimat yesterday, February 1. The celebration was subdued. Like most towns on the relay's route, Kitimat is suffering huge economic blows from the barons of the natural resource industries that are the mainstay of the province's economy. Eurocan paper mill, the second largest industrial employer in Kitimat, announced in late October that its doors would close permanently. The torch relay arrived on the first day of that closure. Five hundred and fifty direct jobs are gone, and several hundred indirect ones. The town loses a huge piece of its industrial tax base.

Several tens of thousands of forest industry jobs have been lost across British Columbia in recent years. Compounding the closures of paper mills and sawmills are deepening cuts to government services. Recently, the closings of 14 schools in Prince George were announced, most in rural areas surrounding the city. That's more than one third of the schools in the regional school district. Prince George is an industrial city of 80,000 located in the geographic center of the province.

These closings have sparked the most significant protests in recent years to provincial government cuts to social programs. Several hundred students and parents from the Prince George Traditional School marched to the offices of provincial education minister Pat Bell on January 25. Two days later, the first protest in the province to greet the torch relay occurred when scores of parents and students brought their concerns over school closings to its route through the city.

A Town Under Corporate Siege

Kitimat is a town of 9,000 under siege by the resource industries on which it was founded. West Fraser Timber Mills closed the Eurocan paper mill because it said the mill was not earning "enough" profit.

Townspeople fear that a similar fate awaits the largest employer in the town, the Rio Tinto (formerly Alcan) aluminum smelter. For years, that company has sought to reduce, or shut down altogether, aluminum production while continuing to run its hydro-electric facilities and earning fantastic profits. The aluminum smelter is busy for now, but its 1300 employees are pressured or obliged to work loads of overtime. An estimated 200 people could be hired at the smelter if the frenetic pace of overtime was curtailed.

Barry Pankhurst, chairperson of the surrounding Coast Mountain School District, says the Olympics Games (the "Vancouver" Games, he stresses) are leaving people in the district with very mixed feelings. "Many people are saying, 'We support the athletes, but not the Games'."

The town is under great pressure, he says, from the combination of factory closings and government spending cuts. The school district recently closed three schools. Five others were closed earlier. “The province has loads of money for a big party in Vancouver, but no money for schools. There’s something wrong here.”

“We Have Nothing Left to Cut”

Pankhurst says the town feels abandoned by the provincial government. “We’ve been deserted. The simple reality is that people feel the government is not here to help us.”

He is worried for the future of the aluminum smelter. “Rio Tinto is not doing the maintenance and upgrades needed to keep the smelter efficient and competitive. It’s a rerun of what happened at Eurocan.”

What’s needed, he says, is a government like Newfoundland’s that is willing to stand up to corporate interests. Last year, the government of premier Danny Williams blocked the paper giant Abitibi Bowater from continuing to use its public license to produce and sell electricity after the company closed the paper mill for which electrical production rights were originally granted, way back in 1912. The government obliged the company to sell its electrical facilities to the province under terms it laid down. (For more on this, see “Confronting Industry Shutdowns: Multinational’s Assets Seized in Newfoundland.”)

Mad Scramble for Resource Industry Profits

The forest industry in British Columbia is being hammered by a combination of the collapse of the U.S. housing industry and the infestation of its pine forests by a native pine beetle.

Rising average winter temperatures and bad tree cutting practices have caused an epidemic of pine tree destruction by the beetle. Clear cutting has degraded the mix of tree species that helped keep the beetle in harmony with forest ecology, while winter temperatures are no longer cold enough to kill off larvae (several weeks of continuous temperatures of minus 20 or colder are required). The pine forests, a vital source for the sawmilling industry, have all but disappeared in the province.

The beetle has recently leaped over its traditional geographic barrier to the east, the Rocky Mountains, and is now spreading inexorably eastward across the vast northern Canadian forests.

Since it was first elected in 2001, the Liberal Party government in BC has offered the natural resources of the province to the highest bidders. A mad scramble has opened – drilling for oil and gas in the north, damming or channelling of hundreds of rivers for ‘green’ electrical production, plans for yet more coal and hard rock mines, regardless of environmental impact, and relentless clear cutting of the forests.

Coastal ocean waters have not escaped the pillage. Vastly increased numbers of salmon farms in coastal inlets as well as urban and industrial development threaten wild stocks of salmon. The salmon are also threatened by rising ocean temperatures. This year saw a catastrophic drop in the numbers of certain species of salmon returning to the spawning grounds of the Fraser River, the world’s largest salmon-spawning river.

The provincial and federal governments are quietly hinting at lifting the decades-old ban on oil and gas drilling and oil tanker traffic along BC's coast, one of the richest and most diverse marine ecologies in the world. U.S. oil and natural gas company Apache has applied to build a \$3-billion natural gas terminal in Kitimat that would service the rapidly expanding natural gas fields in northern BC and the tar sands projects in Alberta.

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Haiti: Restore Democracy, Let Aristide Return!

by Amanda Zivcic

Green Left Weekly, February 5, 2010

In the aftermath of Haiti's January 12 earthquake, the dispatch of US and United Nations troops was given priority — even at the expense of rescue teams and medical aid.

The mainstream media did not generally question the explanation: the country needed "stabilising", security being threatened by "gangs." But the gangs of marauding looters failed to materialise.

Despite the failure of the military-led relief effort to bring food, water or medicine, the survivors responded to their situation with dignity, social solidarity and practical mutual assistance, rather than the predicted violence.

This has not slowed the military buildup, however. As with the UN military occupation that has been "stabilising" Haiti since 2004, the real target is not violent mobs but grassroots self-organisation by Haiti's impoverished majority, in particular, the Lavalas movement led by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who, in 1991, became Haiti's first popularly elected president.

From 1957-1986, Haiti was ruled by two brutal US-backed dictators, Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, until his death in 1971, and then his son Jean-Francois "Baby Doc" Duvalier. The Duvalier regime was marked by the paramilitary death squads, the Tonton Macoutes.

Baby Doc was responsible for opening up the Haitian economy to foreign investment, especially the "light manufacturing and garment industry" (meaning sweatshops). These economic reforms were known as the "American plan".

Tariff removals forced Haitian peasants to compete with subsidised US imports, forcing hundreds of thousands of rural Haitians into the urban slum areas, where US corporations such as Kmart and Disney had sweatshops paying US\$0.11 per hour.

The Tontons Macoutes ensured labour costs stayed low using murder, kidnapping and torture against labour organisers. However, from 1986 onwards, the tide began to turn. In February 1986, a mass uprising that began with food riots forced Baby Doc into exile.

In a January 19 interview with the British *Socialist Worker*, Peter Hallward, author of Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the Politics of Containment described what followed.

"At first it seemed as if the popular movement might gain the upper hand. In the late 1980s it grew rapidly. It drew on the inspiration of liberation theology, and from the anti-imperialist tradition in Latin America.

"Popular protest grew too powerful for the army to control, and in 1990, on the back of the anti-Duvalier movement, Haiti elected a president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who opposed the army and the Duvalierist American plan...

“Aristide and others around him … talked openly about class and the disparity of wealth. They also talked about the need for popular self-defence against the army and the Macoutes — and members of the elite began to panic …”

“The first time Aristide was elected, with 67 percent of the vote, the army dealt with the popular threat in the usual way — with a violent coup. Thousands were killed when the army regained direct control, from 1991 to 1994.”

Aristide lasted nine months before this Washington-instigated coup ousted him. Basic government service provision collapsed and the military regime targeted for repression areas such as Port-au-Prince’s Cite Soleil slum where Lavalas had a high level of popular support.

During his exile in the US, Aristide was held at political gunpoint. The Clinton regime offered him a choice: remain powerless to stop the massacres of Haiti’s poor by the military, or return, but with US troops and neoliberal International Monetary Fund and World Bank conditions.

As part of the neoliberal program the IMF insisted upon, Haiti was told to scrap a law mandating rises in the minimum wage when inflation exceeded 10%, further impoverishing Haitian workers.

Further neoliberal attacks on Haitian agriculture left the country entirely reliant on food imports. Before 1950 Haiti produced 80% of its own food. This has left Haitians at the mercy of global market fluctuations. In 2007 and 2008, there were food riots after price rises had reduced many Haitians to literally eating mud.

Despite the strictures imposed, Aristide achieved some progressive reforms after his 1994 reinstatement, most notably the abolition of the army.

A new party, Fanmi Lavalas, was formed by Aristide in the run-up to 2000 national elections. It was an effort to create a stronger political movement more accountable to popular needs and demands.

Aristide and the new party won in a landslide. The new government fostered grassroots organising and social programs in health, education and other fields. In February 2004, Aristide and his government were overthrown in a second coup, this time spearheaded directly by the US and its partners in Europe and Canada.

Following the 2000 election, the US encouraged, financed and armed a paramilitary force composed of elements of the former Haitian army as well as criminals. Along with Canada and Europe, it instituted a devastating cutoff of aid to the new government.

On February 29, 2004, troops from the US, France and Canada landed in Haiti to “restore order” to a country wracked by the violence of the paramilitaries. US marines kidnapped Aristide, flew him out of the country and opened the gates of Port au Prince to the paramilitaries.

In a January 17 article that questioned the motives of the Western response to the earthquake, *Jamaica Observer* columnist John Maxwell recalled the events of 2004:

“The US Marines protected an undisciplined ragbag of rapists and murderers to allow them entry to the capital.

“The Marines chased the medical students out of the new Medical School established by Aristide with Cuban help and teachers. The Marines bivouac in the school, going out on nightly raids, trailed by fleets of ambulances with body bags, hunting down Fanmi Lavalas activists described as ‘chimeres’ — terrorists.

“The real terrorists, led by two convicted murderers, Chamblain and Philippe, assisted the Marines in the eradication of ‘chimeres’ until the Marines were replaced by foreign troops, paid by the United Nations [the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti — MINUSTAH], who took up the hunt on behalf of the civilised world — France, Canada, the US and Brazil.

“The terrorists and the remains of the Duvalier tontons and the CIA-bred FRAPF declared open season on the remnants of Aristide’s programmes to build democracy.

“They burnt down the new museum of Haitian culture, destroyed the children’s television station and generally laid waste to anything and everything which could remind Haitians of their glorious history.”

Fanmi Lavalas, overwhelmingly the most popular Haitian political organisation, has been banned from taking part in elections under the UN-occupation regime.

Just as the “economic reform” and “development” have become code-words for foreign-owned sweatshops and the destruction of Haitian agriculture, under UN military occupation “nation building” and “developing democratic institutions” are code words for violently suppressing Haitians political aspirations.

Aristide has said he wants to return to Haiti since the earthquake, to help oversee the process of reconstructing a nation.

As film-maker Kevin Pina told the January 16 Independent:

“If Aristide were to return, people would mobilise. Tens of thousands would mobilise just like that. With just picks and shovels they would clean up the mess in just a month.

“They still love him that much.”

For Haiti to rebuild, sovereignty must be restored. Foreign military occupation must end. Aristide should be allowed to return and Haitians should be allowed to decide on their own government and economic policies without any outside interference.

Socialist Voice #407, February 9, 2010

Socialist Voice Readers Debate China

by Ian Angus

In recent weeks an intense discussion of the Chinese state and economy has attracted record numbers of visitors to the *Socialist Voice* website. They've been following an extended debate on whether capitalism has been definitively restored in China, and whether China is pursuing imperialist policies in the Third World.

Unlike many online discussions, this one has been notable for well-argued and thoughtful contributions, and, on the whole, for a tone of mutual respect among the participants, despite their political differences. All of the contributions are well worth reading.

For the benefit of readers who have not been following the debate, this article offers a brief summary of the principal issues under discussion, together with links to the main contributions.

Background

The discussion actually began last April, with John Riddell's article, "50 Years After: The Tragedy of China's 'Great Leap Forward'". Describing the Chinese Revolution of 1949 as a victory that "laid the foundation for China's present dynamism and influence, as well as providing an enormous impetus to anti-colonial revolution worldwide," Riddell suggested that the so-called "Great Leap Forward" of 1958-59 undermined the revolution's gains.

"The architects of the Great Leap hoped that its arbitrary, coercive, and destructive character would be justified by a jump in production. This, they hoped, would create the preconditions for a truly just society. However, the resulting collapse of production is strong evidence that socialist policies must not destroy but build on worker and peasant culture, wisdom, initiative, and control – what the Venezuelan revolutionists today call 'protagonism.'

Riddell's article prompted comments from Walter Lippmann and Herman Rosenfeld. Hoping to involve more readers in the discussion, we reposted some of these comments, with Riddell's replies, as a separate article, "Socialists and China: An Exchange," on January 10.

Other readers did indeed join in. The discussion has been wide-ranging, including contributions on the relevance of the Trotskyist theory of "Permanent Revolution," and on Fidel Castro's public statements about China, but for the most part it has focused on two main topics.

Is China a Bourgeois State or a Workers' State? Praba argues that China remains a workers state, while Chris Slee says the Chinese state can no longer be described as working-class in character.

Among their disagreements is the class nature of the Chinese leaders who have pressed for reforms in the interests of working people; Praba calls them "pro-communist elements," while Slee says they are "bourgeois nationalists."

Fred Feldman says that despite the damage done by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the “anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist foundations created by the great Chinese revolution” have not been destroyed.

Is China Imperialist? In a parallel discussion, Dimitris Fasalis and Fred Feldman have been debating whether China is imperialist, as Marxists use that term. Fasalis argues that it is, citing China’s investments and other activities in Africa.

Feldman replies that despite its economic growth, China remains an oppressed and dependent nation that socialists should defend against North American and European imperialism.

To follow the discussion as it has taken place to date, simply go to the January 10 article and scroll down through the article and comments.

The disadvantage of that method is that the Comments appear in chronological order, so the various topics are intermingled. Readers who wish to follow the two main threads may find the following outline useful. The quotes merely illustrate key arguments: follow the links to read each comment in full.

IS CHINA A BOURGEOIS STATE OR A WORKERS’ STATE?

Praba: “The PRC remains a workers state (although one where there has been dangerous levels of capitalist penetration). The attitude of socialists to the PRC must be one of overwhelming solidarity while opposing any rightist tendencies within the ruling party.”

Riddell: “The fact that capitalist accumulation is so prominent in the Chinese economy today does not imply, in my opinion, that the Chinese state is necessarily bourgeois.”

Slee: “China’s rapid economic growth is in part due to the decision of many transnational corporations to make China their main base for the export of goods to the world market. . . They believed that the Deng Xiaoping regime was a reliable pro-capitalist government.”

Slee: “My current view is that these changes are reforms within capitalism, rather than the start of a renewed drive towards socialism.... However, if we were to see a deepening of these progressive measures in coming years, I would have to look again at how I analyse the situation.”

Praba: “The notion that China’s rapid development is primarily due to foreign investment is in good part a Western media myth. The main reason for the PRC’s economic success has been the dominance of its economy by large state-owned enterprises.”

Lippmann: “Where else in the capitalist world in today’s era of neo-liberal globalization are capitalist governments giving workers *more* rights, encouraging *more* unionization and creating *new* welfare systems to replace old ones destroyed by privatization?”

Slee: “During the 1990s, the Chinese bureaucracy lost its fear of the working class sufficiently to carry out massive privatisation. The subsequent rise of working class struggle revived that fear a

bit, causing the partial reversal of some neoliberal policies. Whether the predominance of capitalist relations of production will be overturned remains to be seen.”

Slee: “We should remember that it was the CP government (under a previous leadership) that created the problems which the current leadership is trying to ameliorate. Secondly, the reforms adopted so far don’t solve all the problems which the previous policies created.”

Praba: “The question of the class nature of the state power that holds sway in the world’s most populous country is a critical one. It is a question not of academic importance but a question that shapes what attitude socialists in the West should take to the PRC state – hostility or solidarity.”

Slee: “A strong state sector does not necessarily prove the existence of a workers state. Iraq under Saddam Hussein had a strong state sector, but the state served the interests of the Iraqi capitalist class.”

IS CHINA IMPERIALIST?

Riddell: “China is often called imperialist, but I don’t see the evidence. … The Chinese state does not appear to need at present to conquer spheres of influence and assert its economic and political domination over client states and semi-colonies.”

Fasfalis: “The evidence … of Chinese imperialistic policies exists: Chinese foreign direct investments in African countries such as Angola, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroun and Nigeria are designed to secure, thus to control, energy and mineral supplies.”

Feldman: “Dimitris’ unproven claim that China is engaging in unequal exchange with African countries would not prove that China was an imperialist power even if Dimitris proved it to be a fact that China was engaged in unequal exchange with some or all of them.”

Fasfalis: “It is not the unequal terms of exchange that make China an imperialist state. It is rather the fact that its investments abroad (emanating from public or private companies) are searching to establish in some cases a control on its hosts.”

The discussion continues...

Socialist Voice is pleased to be hosting this debate. We encourage other readers to participate, using the Comments box below.

Socialist Voice #408, February 15, 2010

Manifesto for a Pluralist Quebec

Introduction by Richard Fidler

Quebec's public debate over reasonable accommodation of minorities, especially religious minorities, continues to rage. A recent contribution that has attracted much comment and controversy is the *Manifesto for a Pluralist Quebec*, the short version of which is translated below.

Life on the Left has translated and published a number of previous contributions to the debate as it has centered on the left party Québec solidaire, which has come out strongly in support of an “open secularism” that respects the expression of freedom of conscience in a context of state neutrality.[1]

It may be hard for many non-Quebeckers to understand why these issues arouse such emotions and controversy in Quebec. After all, freedom of belief and the right to manifest one's beliefs publicly as well as privately has long been recognized in international law and convention. For example, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides, in article 18, that

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

However, these issues can prove unexpectedly complex in nations that are characterized by insecurity over their national identity and status. Quebec is an example. In a recent newspaper article, philosopher Michel Seymour of the Université de Montréal argues – correctly, in my view – that the debate can only be appreciated by understanding “the source of the uneasiness over identity experienced by the people of Quebec”:

“They have faced numerous rebuffs by the Canadian state over the last 50 years. Against their will, a new constitutional order was imposed on them in 1982 and the Meech Lake Accord, which was aimed at repairing the damage, was rejected. During the same period the Québécois suffered two referendum defeats. They are still in a constitutional ‘no-man’s-land’ and a legal limbo. More profoundly, they are not recognized as a people internationally or as a people within Canada. So they suffer from a need for recognition and a lack of national affirmation.”

Quebec's political situation, says Seymour, “largely explains the reaction of many people to the growing number of examples of accommodations. These Québécois have been confronted with citizens who manage to assert themselves, to demand recognition of their cultural practices and defend their rights, while the Quebec people as a whole do not appear to be in a position to obtain an analogous recognition within Canada.”

The *Manifesto for a Pluralist Quebec* offers a clear description of what secularism entails, and the distinction between state action and the expression of private or personal belief. It is a welcome addition to the public debate, which, as it says, has become highly polarized between extremes that present themselves as mutually exclusive. It makes a substantial argument from the standpoint of liberal principles.

But in my view the Manifesto pays insufficient attention to the aspect highlighted by Prof. Seymour and a few others – the national oppression of Quebec and the complex effect this has on the debate on accommodations. Worse, it bases its position in part on the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, part of the Constitution imposed on Quebec in 1982. That Charter (not to be confused, as the Manifesto does, with Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms) was directed in part against Quebec's national movement. It denied Quebec a veto over constitutional change and contained a number of provisions that have been used by the courts to overthrow key parts of Quebec's popular *Charter of the French Language*. This Constitution as a whole, adopted in the wake of the 1980 referendum defeat, fails to recognize Quebec's national character.

The Quebec debate is not simply between “conservative nationalists” and strict or absolute secularists, on the one side, and philosophical liberals. It is also a debate within the national movement and Quebec society as a whole over important questions involving conceptions of the nation itself and how ethnic and religious minorities can be integrated within it.

The Manifesto equates the state's interest with “democracy” and the “common good”, and portrays the state (both federal and provincial) as the protector of “citizens' equality”. This tends to ignore the underlying class differences and the crucial role of the state in upholding, reinforcing and reproducing those differences within the broader society. “Respect for the rights of minorities, including religious minorities, is part of our tradition, and the legacy of the Charters,” states the Manifesto. Well, yes and no. The Canadian Charter certainly fails to respect the rights of the Québécois national minority.

True, the longer version of the Manifesto does address the national question in one paragraph, but treats it as largely resolved:

“It seems erroneous to us to argue that this policy of respect for diversity implemented in Quebec in recent decades has had as a consequence the negation of the Québécois nation or the interests of the majority. There is no incompatibility in affirming both respect for diversity and the continuity of the Québécois nation. Quebec already selects about 70% of its newcomers in terms of its collective interests and criteria that it has established itself.... It has adopted a Charter of the French Language that defends and promotes the language of the majority. As to ‘open’ secularism, it makes a distinction between the historical heritage and identifying the state with a particular religion. The non-confessional teaching of religions provided by the Ethics and Religious Culture course, for example, grants a greater place to Christian traditions because of their historical importance in Quebec.”

There is no recognition here that a people lacking full democratic and constitutional sovereignty cannot rely on state legislation and judicial review and enforcement to remedy their national inequality. An independent Quebec in which French was in fact and not just in law the “language of common public discourse” would find it easier to approach issues of minority integration and citizenship with much greater confidence and tolerance toward minority ethnicities and their religions and cultures.

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MANIFESTO FOR A PLURALIST QUEBEC

The debate on identity is taking a dangerous turn. An open and pluralist vision of Quebec society is coming under the combined attack of two currents at odds with the major orientations of modern Quebec.

One, a “conservative nationalist” vision, sees today’s Quebec as having conceded too much to cultural diversity. Interculturalism, open secularism and reasonable accommodation practices,[2] it alleges, are jeopardizing an authentic Quebec culture, eclipsing the memory of the historic majority. The other, a strict vision of secularism, objects to conspicuous religious manifestations in the public sphere. It seeks to expel religion from the public space, in the name, this time, of a conception of society that limits any sign of religious allegiance to the private space alone.

These two currents, at first sight different, concur in a similar attitude of intransigence toward minorities, demanding that they submit to a vision of Quebec society that they did not help to forge. And they concur as well in their call for strict application of the principles of secularism in opposition to citizens professing religious beliefs that are held to be incompatible with Quebec values.

But there is another vision of our society, one that is more tolerant and above all more dynamic in its conception of social relations. It corresponds more closely to the requirements of contemporary Quebec and it must be defended.

Pluralism and interculturalism

Pluralism is accused of relativism, Trudeau-ist multiculturalism, “Charter-ism”,[3] antinationalism, elitism, etc. But far from all these “isms”, the pluralist position considers that the members of the minorities should not be made the victims of discrimination or exclusion on the basis of their difference, and that the integration of immigrants in Quebec society should not require pure and simple assimilation. If an immigrant must strive to become integrated in the host society and comply with its laws and institutions, the host society must ensure that it lifts the obstacles to this integration. The duty of adaptation is reciprocal.

The pluralist position is based on respect for and recognition of diversity. That does not mean that any and all cultural and religious practices must be tolerated, or that Quebec society must be conceived as the juxtaposition of communities that are shut off from each other. On the contrary, pluralism favours intercultural relationships and is meant to be a deepening of democratic values.

Secularism

Sometimes secularism is demanded as if its principles were absent from our public culture. This is mistaken. In Quebec, the state elaborates the collective norms independently of groups based on religion or conviction. It exercises its neutrality by refraining from promoting or impeding, directly or indirectly, a religion or a secular conception of existence, within the limits of the common good. This policy orientation responds to the need to protect freedom of conscience and its free expression, as well as the equality of citizens. This means that civic and political rights are not conditional on the abdication of the beliefs and practices of those who express them.

However, we find that the idea is cropping up in Quebec that religious adherence that is publicly expressed is prejudicial to national identity, hence the necessity to adopt a charter of secularism.[4] But as a matter of fact such a charter would be primarily a legal instrument prohibiting the manifestation of religious allegiance in the public sphere as well as requests for accommodation on religious grounds.

While it is essential to agree on the meaning and scope of secularism, the outright banning of any manifestation of religious adherence does not respond to any social necessity. Such a prohibition would have a discriminatory effect, for it would target only believers belonging to religions that entail prescriptions on clothing or food. But above all, it would be disproportionate to the objectives, such as neutrality of public services.

Secularism is imposed on the state

This institutional neutrality requires that collective norms be applied impartially, irrespective of gender, ethnic origin or religious adherence. The fact that a state agent displays a sign of religious adherence does not prevent him or her in any way from impartially applying the secular norms; a citizen may only note this religious sign in the same way as he or she may notice the civil servant's ethnic origin.

It cannot be assumed that this religious affiliation constitutes a subjectivity that interferes in the way in which the official applies the law or regulation, any more than his or her skin colour or gender does. On the other hand, the prohibition of religious signs may be justified if those signs result in a malfunctioning of the service, a problem of safety or security, or discriminatory treatment of other persons, or if they give rise to proselytism. Secularism is imposed on the state, not on individuals.

Common values

There is much talk about “Quebec values”. Some say accommodations, the Ethics and Religious Culture [ECR] course in the schools[5] and other measures make minority values override those of the majority or promote relativism. On the contrary, they say, the majority has the right to demand that immigrants conform to “our” values. But what about these values?

According to certain conservative nationalists, diversity is simply skin-deep. There is in Quebec a silent majority, they say, that has never renounced its traditional values, which represent our

true identity. This rhetoric is more a reflection of the voluntarism of its defenders than it is an accurate representation of Quebec society. By what mystical symbiosis do they manage to uncover the true content of the values of this majority? It must be said that they are projecting their own preferences, postulating a vast consensus in favour of those preferences.

Other critics, however, claim to find these common values in something short of the proliferation of life styles – in some abstractly formulated principles such as democracy, rights, freedom, pluralism and equality between men and women. But how are the concrete limits of these rights to be defined? And what exactly does this commitment imply, over and above compliance with the laws? If we try to answer these questions, we again find the complexity that we had hoped to avoid. It would be futile to try to reduce the diversity of contemporary Quebec. Instead, we should find the means for dialogue that will enable us to reach common decisions beyond our differences.

The charters of rights and the institutions

The “reasonable accommodations crisis” has revealed the existence among some of a crisis of confidence in our institutions, and in particular in the capacity of the law and the courts to oversee the implementation of these accommodations on the basis of fundamental values and principles.

While our political and policy-making institutions have a role to play in defining accommodation practices, we must ensure that the fundamental texts, our Charters of Rights, are not devalued. Yet that is what we do when they are made to compete with other values – for example, when gender equality, separation of church and state, primacy of the French language or (in a bill recently tabled in the National Assembly) Quebec’s historical heritage are made to trump Charter rights. That is a tautological exercise.

In fact, some of these elements (such as equality between men and women) already underlie some general legal concepts such as the prohibition of discrimination. Similarly, the separation of church and state, which has been explicitly recognized by our courts since the 1950s, is now conceptualized as resulting from the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Charters of Rights.

These rights and freedoms are more than a disembodied set of norms. On the contrary, respect for the rights of minorities, including religious minorities, is part of our tradition, and the legacy of the Charters.

The path of continuity

The critics of pluralism often accuse it of breaking with Quebec’s historical trajectory. But instead it is the advocates of an absolute secularism and a conservative identity-based nationalism who are choosing to break with that trajectory.

The *Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, interculturalism, the *Charter of the French Language*, and open secularism are intended to establish a balance, always shifting, between the legitimate concerns of the majority and the concerns of the minorities. The constant search for

this balance honours Quebec and continues to be the condition for genuine cohabitation. It is our hope that it will continue.

[signed] Pierre Bosset, Dominique Leydet, Jocelyn Maclure, Micheline Milot and Daniel Weinstock.

The authors are all professors (jurisprudence, philosophy or sociology) at the University of Montreal, Laval University or the University of Quebec in Montréal. More than 800 additional signatories support the content of this manifesto.

Translator's Notes

[1] See these SV articles:

- Quebec Left Debates Strategy for Independence;
- Quebec needs workers' unity, not a 'charter of secularism' – Québec solidaire;
- Québec solidaire members defend party's position on secularism, women's rights;
- Secularism – For a broad, open and democratic debate.

[2] Summary definitions of these terms, commonly used in Quebec's debates on secularism, are provided in the report of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (the "Bouchard-Taylor commission", after its co-chairs), which published its report in May 2008:

Interculturalism: A policy or model that advocates harmonious relations between cultures based on intensive exchanges centred on an integration process that does not seek to eliminate differences while fostering the development of a common identity.

Open secularism: A form of secularism that allows displays of the religious in public institutions, for example, among the clientele and staff of schools and hospitals.

Reasonable accommodation: An arrangement that falls under the legal sphere, more specifically case law, aimed at relaxing the application of a norm or a statute in favour of an individual or a group of people threatened with discrimination for one of the reasons specified in the Charter.

[3] See the Introduction, above, for explanations of these terms. "Multiculturalism", the term given legislative force by the Trudeau government and incorporated in the Canadian Charter, is often distinguished from "interculturalism" in Quebec because, as the Bouchard-Taylor commission says, it is often interpreted to mean that "a society's common identity is defined solely through reference to political principles rather than to a culture, ethnicity or history," and thus fails to reflect Quebec's historical and cultural heritage.

[4] A proposed *Charte de la laïcité*, or Charter of Secularism, has been drawn up by an improvised "citizen's collective for equality and secularism" (CCIEL in its French acronym). It calls, inter alia, for banning the display of "conspicuous religious signs", such as wearing the hijab, from all public institutions, government offices and the schools. The Parti Québécois has indicated its support for this "charter".

[5] In the wake of deconfessionalization of Quebec's public schools, finally won in 1997 through an amendment to the Canadian Constitution, a government-appointed commission proposed that comparative religions be taught in the elementary and secondary schools. It began to be implemented in 2008. See also Report of the Task Force on Curriculum Reform. The ECR course has been widely criticized as an indirect means of reintroducing religious instruction in the schools.

Richard Fidler is a Socialist Voice Contributing Editor. This translation, and his introduction, first appeared in his blog, Life on the Left.

Socialist Voice #409, February 15, 2010

Thousands protest opening of Vancouver Winter Olympics

By Roger Annis

(Vancouver BC) Five thousand people took to the streets here on February 12 to protest the opening of the corporate spectacle known as the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. The largest social rights action in Vancouver in many years coincided with the Games' opening ceremony at a downtown arena attended by 60,000 people.

The demonstration was organized by the Olympic Resistance Network, 2010 Welcoming Committee, and many affiliated and participating organizations. Slogans and chants on the march reflected the concerns of participants, many of whom traveled from across British Columbia and northwest United States, and of a broad cross section of the population of the province of British Columbia.

“2010 homes, not 2010 Games!” and “Homes not Games!” were the most common chants. They spoke to the crisis of homelessness across British Columbia and the broken promises of Games’ sponsors and organizers to build meaningful housing for the homeless as part of an “Olympic legacy.”

Another popular chant was “No Olympics on stolen Native lands!” The governments of Canada and British Columbia have stalled for years in reaching land and resource claim settlements with some 300 Indigenous communities/peoples in the province. Industrial, tourism and other capitalist developments routinely take place on disputed lands without permission of its historic owners.

War Games

Antiwar chants were popular throughout the march. The staging of the Games has seen a full-scale police and military occupation of the city and surrounding region. There are more Canadian troops deployed to Vancouver for the Games (4,500) than to Afghanistan. The “security” budget for the Games will top \$1 billion.

The International Olympic Committee promotes a tradition of “truce” in military conflict in the lead-up to and during Olympic Games. Last October, the host country of these Games introduced a resolution at the United Nations to this effect, purportedly promoting the “ideals of peace, friendship and international understanding.”

Point one of the 5-point resolution “urges Member States to observe, within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations, the Olympic Truce, individually and collectively, during the XXI Winter Olympic Games and the X Paralympic Winter Games...”

The UN resolution notwithstanding, Canada and its war allies have said all along they will not observe a truce in Afghanistan, and in fact Canada and its NATO allies have launched a major military offensive there, possibly the largest since the war of occupation began in 2001.

The “Truce Patron” for the Vancouver Olympics is Canada’s Governor General, Michaëlle Jean. Last September, in her first speech in that capacity, she told an audience in Vancouver, “The Olympic Truce tradition gives us an opportunity to really think about what peace really means. It allows us to reflect on our roles as ambassadors of peace and solidarity.”

“Going for the gold”

A rally preceding the march heard speakers from many of the organizing groups. A march sendoff was delivered by Garth Mullins of the ORN. He drew a roar of approval when he said, “Olympics officials said we couldn’t get such numbers out to a march and deliver a firm message of opposition to the Games. But we’ve done it. Now it’s time to deliver our message. Let’s go for the Gold!”

The march was orderly and disciplined, rebuffing police warnings that it would descend into violence and mayhem. Extra security precautions were taken by march organizers to prevent police provocateurs from disrupting the event. The “Integrated Security Unit” of Games organizers had refused to divulge whether it would send provocateurs into the march, as other police agencies have done in recent protest actions in Canada.

On two occasions earlier the same day, several hundred protesters blocked the route of the Olympic Flame as it wound its way through Vancouver neighbourhoods on the final leg of a months-long parading across Canada.

Noticeably absent from the February 12 march were contingents from the trade unions and their political party, the NDP. Days before the opening ceremony, party leader Carole James reiterated her party’s devotion to the Games in a joint celebration in the BC legislature with the widely-hated Premier Gordon Campbell.

Support for the Olympics in BC has steadily declined in recent years as Campbell’s government has stepped up cuts to social programs while spending lavishly on the Games. The latest cut was announced one day before the opening ceremony. Organizations that provide services to some of the most vulnerable children in the province will lose \$10 million. They provide such services as crisis phone lines and help for those with mental health problems and addictions.

Distrust of Olympics organizers has been highlighted by the death of a 21-year old luge athlete Nodar Kumaritashvili of the Republic of Georgia on the day of the opening ceremony. He crashed during a training run on a Games track that many athletes had warned was too fast and dangerous. The International Luge Federation, an affiliate of the International Olympic Committee, conducted a quick investigation of Kumaritashvili’s death and said it was due to “athlete error.” The competition proceeded the following day.

Scores of additional protest actions will take place during the 17 days of the Games. Many will focus on Vancouver’s homeless crisis, including the mounting of a permanent tent city in the poor, downtown neighbourhood that lies just blocks away from the arena where the glitz and outrageously expensive opening ceremony was held.

On February 15, the Stopwar coalition is organizing a march to oppose the war in Afghanistan and the militarization of Vancouver and surrounding region, and in support of aid, not troops, for Haiti.

In a press release, the coalition writes, “Vancouver’s Stopwar coalition is deeply concerned about the continued escalation of the war in Afghanistan, especially in light of the supposed commitment of the Vancouver Olympic Committee (VANOC) to the Olympic Truce. Stopwar calls on the Canadian government to observe the Olympic truce, and to use the truce to begin a full and complete withdrawal of Canadian forces from Afghanistan.”

Roger Annis is a trade union and antiwar activist in Vancouver BC. He has written frequently on the Vancouver Winter Olympics.

Socialist Voice #410, February 22, 2010

Did Engels Condemn Gay Sexuality?

A Stalin-era translation misrepresents the views of the founders of the modern socialist movement.

The following letter and the response by Sherry Wolf appear in the March-April issue of International Socialist Review.

The November-December issue of the *ISR* includes a review of Sherry Wolf's new book, *Sexuality and Socialism: History, Politics and Theory of LGBT Liberation*.

We look forward to reading this important book, but we would like to draw attention to a significant translation problem. The review says, in regard to Marx and Engels,

“Their sole public reference is a line about ‘the abominable practice of sodomy’ in Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.”

Friedrich Engels never wrote those words.

Engels wrote *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in 1884, in German, drawing on notes prepared by Marx before his death. It was translated into Russian in 1892, but an English translation didn't appear until 1902, after Engels' death.

However, the most widely circulated English version was published in 1942 in a translation by Alick West and Dona Torr, prominent members of the British Communist Party. That's the version that contains the words quoted in the review. In a section discussing the ancient Greeks:

“They fell into the abominable practice of sodomy and degraded alike their gods and themselves with the myth of Ganymede.”

Surprisingly, the West-Torr edition appears not to have been translated from Engels' original German text, but, according to the copyright page, “from the fourth Russian edition, Moscow, 1934.”

What Engels wrote, in German, was

“*sie versanken in die Widerwärtigkeit der Knabenliebe und ihre Götter entwürdigten wie sich selbst durch den Mythus von Ganymed.*”

West and Torr rendered “*die Widerwärtigkeit der Knabenliebe*” as “the abominable practice of sodomy.”

Volume 26 of the *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (MECW), published in 1990, translates the phrase as “the perversion of boy-love.”

A better translation would be “repugnant boy-love,” but the MECW text is far truer to the original German than the West-Torr version.

So Engels was criticizing the Greeks not for homosexuality, but for pederasty – the sexual abuse of children.

That interpretation is strengthened by Engels' reference to “the myth of Ganymede” -in which the god Zeus falls in love with and kidnaps a beautiful young boy. Again, the issue is child abuse.

Marxists consider that adults who have sexual relations with young people are violating the rights of children. Given the disparities of power, no child can give meaningful consent to sexual relations with an adult. That was the ancient Greek interpretation of the Ganymede myth, and it was Engels' view as well.

We don't have access to the 1934 Russian version of *Origin of the Family*, so we can't check whether the “sodomy” mistranslation first occurred there, or if it originated with West and Torr.

Either way, it was consistent with Stalinist policy: homosexual acts, which had been removed from the criminal code shortly after the 1917 revolution, were recriminalized by Stalin in 1933.

The founders of Marxism did not provide any analysis of the situation of gays. Marxists have learned much from the insights of the gay and lesbian liberation movement in recent decades. But the claim that Engels denounced sodomy in one of his most important works is a Stalinist invention.

Ian Angus & John Riddell
Editors, *Socialist Voice*

Sherry Wolf responds: Thank you Ian and John for raising this little known fact. Another studious reader familiar with the original German, Keith Rosenthal, called this to my attention after reading *Sexuality and Socialism*. The book is heading into its second printing with the correct translation noted.

Socialist Voice #411, February 22, 2010

Venezuela's Revolution Faces Crucial Battles

by Federico Fuentes

Federico Fuentes is a member of the Green Left Weekly Caracas bureau. He will be speaking in six Canadian cities between February 26 and March 7

Decisive battles between the forces of revolution and counter-revolution loom on the horizon in Venezuela. The campaign for the September 26 National Assembly elections will be a crucial battle between the supporters of socialist President Hugo Chavez and the US-backed right-wing opposition.

But these battles, part of the class struggle between the poor majority and the capitalist elite, will be fought more in the streets than at the ballot box.

So far this year, there has been an escalation of fascist demonstrations by violent opposition student groups; the continued selective assassination of union and peasant leaders by right-wing paramilitaries; and an intensified private media campaign presenting a picture of a debilitated government in crisis — and on its way out.

Chavez warned on January 29: “If they initiate an extremely violent offensive, that obliges us to take firm action — something I do not recommend they do — our response will wipe them out.” The comment came the day after two students were killed and 21 police suffered bullet wounds in confrontations that rocked the city of Merida.

Chavez challenged the opposition to follow the constitutional road and a recall referendum on his presidential mandate if they truly believe people no longer support him. Under the democratic constitution adopted in 1999, a recall referendum can be called on any elected official if 20% of the electorate sign a petition calling for one. He said if the capitalists continued down the road of confrontation, he would “accelerate the revolution”, which has declared “21st century socialism” as its goal.

Offensive

The stepped-up campaign of destabilisation is part of the regional offensive launched by the opposition’s masters in Washington.

Last year, the US installed new military bases in Colombia and Panama, reactivated the US Navy Fourth Fleet to patrol Latin American waters, and helped organise a military coup that toppled the left-wing Manuel Zelaya government in Honduras. This year, the US has occupied Haiti with 15,000 soldiers after the January 12 earthquake and US warplanes have been caught violating Venezuela’s airspace.

A February 2 report from US National Director of Intelligence, Admiral Dennis Blair, labelled Venezuela the “leading anti-US regional force” — placing the Chavez government in Washington’s crosshairs.

A US military invasion cannot be ruled out, but the main aim of the US military build-up and provocations is to apply pressure on those sections of Venezuela's Armed Forces, and others in the pro-Chavez camp, that would prefer to put the brakes on the revolutionary process to avoid a confrontation.

This is occurring hand-in-hand with a campaign of media lies, combining claims that Chavez's popularity is rapidly declining with rumours of dissent in the military and government.

The US and Venezuelan elite hope to isolate and ultimately remove Chavez.

The campaign is similar to the one unleashed in 2007 to defeat Chavez's proposed constitutional reforms, which would have created a legal framework for greater attacks on capital to the benefit of the poor majority but were narrowly defeated in a referendum.

The opposition hopes to fracture Chavez's support base — the poor majority and the armed forces — and win a majority in the National Assembly (with which it is likely to move to impeach Chavez).

At the very least, the opposition is seeking to stop pro-revolution forces from winning a two-thirds majority in the assembly, which would restrict the ease with which the Chavistas could pass legislation. The current assembly has a large pro-Chavez majority as a result of the opposition boycotting the 2005 poll.

Revolution advances

The global economic crisis is hitting Venezuela harder than the government initially hoped. Problems in the electricity sector, among others, are also causing strain.

The government's campaign to raise awareness about the effects of climate change and wasteful usage has minimised the impact of the opposition and private media campaign to blame the government for the problems in the electricity and water sectors.

Far from fulfilling right-wing predictions that falling oil prices would result in a fall of the government's fortunes, Chavez has continued his push to redistribute wealth to the poor — and increased moves against capital and corruption.

This is occurring alongside important street mobilisations supporting the government (ignored by the international media, which gave prominent coverage to small opposition student riots).

There are new steps to increase the transfer of power to the people, such as incorporating the grassroots communal councils further into governing structures.

In November, Chavez announced interventions into eight banks found to be involved in corrupt dealings. A majority were nationalised and merged with a state bank to form the Bicentenary Bank. Together with the Bank of Venezuela, nationalised in 2007, the state now controls 25% of the banking sector — the largest single bloc.

Nearly 30 bankers were charged and face trial over the corruption allegations. Significantly, a number of these had been closely aligned with the government. One of them, Ricardo Fernandez

Barrueco, was a relatively unknown entrepreneur in the food sector who rose up the ranks of the business elite to own four banks and 29 Venezuelan companies. Much of this meteoric rise was due to his ties with a section of the Chavez government, which provided him with generous contracts to supply government-subsidised Mercal food stores with produce and transportation. This earned Fernandez the nickname the “Czar of Mercal”.

The arrest of another banker over corruption allegations, Arne Chacon, led to the resignation of his brother Jessie Chacon as Chavez’s science minister.

State institutions, militants of the Chavez-led United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), and the National Guard have also moved to tackle price speculation following the January 8 decision to devalue the local currency, the bolivar. More than 1000 shops were temporary shutdown for price speculation in the first week after the announcement.

On February 13, Chavez announced that the government had come to an agreement with French company Casino to buy out 80% of its shares in the CADA supermarket chain, which has 35 outlets across the country.

Together with the recently nationalised Exito supermarket chain and the mass importation of various essential goods, the government is moving to take up a much larger share of the retail and distribution sector.

The bolivar devaluation means imported goods have become more expensive, lowering workers’ purchasing power. To compensate, the government decreed in January a 25% increase in the minimum wage (10% to be implemented in March and 15% in September).

Government sources told *Green Left Weekly* it is also studying a further wage increase and steps towards establishing a state monopoly over foreign trade.

Grassroots organising

Despite the violent protests and slander campaign, a January poll by the Venezuelan Institute of Data Analysis (IVAD — generally accepted as one of Venezuela’s least biased polling companies) found more than 58% of Venezuelans continue to approve of Chavez’s presidency.

The same poll also found 41.5% believed the opposition should have a National Assembly majority, compared to 49.5% who didn’t. Some 32.6% said they would vote for pro-revolution candidates, 20.8% for the opposition and an important 33.1% for “independents”.

That 33.1% will undoubtedly shrink by September. The question is whether this section will abstain (as in the 2007 constitutional referendum) or the revolutionary forces can organise themselves to win them over and deal a decisive blow to the right.

Three massive pro-revolution demonstrations have been held already this year, dwarfing the small but violent opposition protests.

A new grouping of revolutionary youth organisations, the Bicentenary National Youth Front, has also been created to organise the pro-revolution majority of youth and students. The injection of

organised youth into the revolution is vital for its future. This is needed, as Chavez noted in his February 12 speech to a mass demonstration of students in Caracas, to tackle the serious problems of reformism and bureaucratism that hamper the revolution.

Chavez has argued against those sectors of the revolutionary camp that insist it is possible to advance by strengthening the private sector and wooing capitalists. Chavez has repeatedly said the “national bourgeoisie” has no interest in advancing the process of change.

Chavez has emphasised the “class struggle” is at the heart of this process.

He said it was vital to combat the inefficiency and bureaucracy of the state structures inherited from previous governments that hold back and sabotage the process. “We have to finish off demolishing the old structures of the bourgeois state and create the new structures of the proletarian state.”

To help achieve this, the government has encouraged the creation of 184 communes across Venezuela. Communes are made up of a number of communal councils and other social organisations, bodies directly run and controlled by local communities. Chavez has referred to the communes as the “building blocks” of the new state, in which power is intended to be progressively transferred to the organised people.

The recent creation of peasant militias, organised for self-defence by poor farmers against large landowner violence, is also important.

However, the biggest challenge is the continued construction of the PSUV, a mass party with millions of still largely passive members, as a revolutionary instrument of the masses.

In its extraordinary congress, which began in November and continues meeting on weekends until April, debates are occurring among the 772 elected delegates. Differences have arisen between those who support a more moderate reformist approach and those arguing for a revolutionary path.

An important debate is over whether to back Chavez’s call for a new international organisation to unite revolutionary forces globally to strengthen the fight for “socialism of the 21st century.”

The debates also included whether party members will elect National Assembly candidates, or whether this important decision would be left in the hands of a select committee, as more conservative forces preferred.

After the decision to hold primary elections for candidates was announced, Chavez said on February 11: “I have confidence in the people, I have confidence in the grassroots, they will not defraud us.”

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Canadian Meetings Salute 10 Years of Venezuelan Revolution

Two Caracas-based activists, Federico Fuentes and Kiraz Janicke, will speak in Toronto, Kingston, Ottawa, Montreal, Victoria and Vancouver between February 26 and March 7, in a tour organized by the Centre for Social Justice and the Venezuela We Are with You Coalition in Toronto.

Their tour takes place at a decisive turning point in the Venezuelan revolutionary process, as U.S.-backed rightist forces escalate attacks on the movement of working people and the Bolivarian government.

During the eleven years since Hugo Chavez was elected as President of Venezuela, his country has become a focus of hope on a world scale. At the Copenhagen climate conference, Venezuela helped lead the countries calling for international social and ecological justice.

Throughout these years, popular participation and control has been the strength and promise of Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution. The Fuentes-Janick tour will focus on the gains of the people's movement and the dangers and challenges it faces today.

Federico Fuentes is an associate of the Centro Internacional Miranda, an independent agency funded by Venezuela's Ministry of Popular Power for Higher Education in Caracas. Together with Marta Harnecker, he leads two CIM study projects: "Political Instruments for the 21st Century" and "Popular Participation in Public Management."

Kiraz Janicke is a journalist for Venezuelanalysis.com, the foremost independent English-language source of news on Venezuela. She is editor of the Peru en Movimiento website and a member of the Caracas bureau of Green Left Weekly.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FUENTES-JANICKE TOUR:

Toronto

- *Friday, February 26, 7:00 pm.* Public Forum: Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution: Profile of a Peoples' Movement. Koffler House Rom 108 – 569 Spadina Ave. (North of College St.). Speakers: Federico Fuentes and Kiraz Janicke
- *Saturday, Feb 27, 9:30 am – 5 pm.* Teach-In: Venezuela's Revolution: The Second Decade. Ten panels on topics related to Venezuela, with 25 speakers, including Fuentes and Janicke.. Sidney Smith Building, Room 2117 — 100 St. George St. (North of College St.). Donation: \$10 or what you can
- *Wednesday, March 2, 5:00 pm – 8 pm.* Seminar: Popular Education in Venezuela. Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, room 7-119

Kingston

- *Monday, March 1, 11:30 am – 1:00 pm.* Indigenous Resistance and Popular Sovereignty in Bolivia and Venezuela. Public Meeting with Kiraz Janicke. Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre, 146 Barrie St.

Ottawa

- *Monday, March 1, 7:30 pm.* Public Forum: Venezuela's Alliances for Sovereignty & Development: A Participant*s Report. PSAC building, 233 Gilmour Street (at Metcalfe). Speaker: Federico Fuentes
- *Tuesday March 2.* Federico Fuentes speaks at University of Ottawa

Montreal

- *Thursday-Friday, March 4-5.* Public Meetings with Kiraz Janicke

Victoria

- *March 3, 7:30pm.* Public Forum: Venezuela's Revolution – The Second Decade. BCGEU Hall — 2994 Douglas. Speaker: Federico Fuentes

Vancouver

- *March 5, 7:00 pm.* Public forum: Hope For Haiti In Latin America. Vancouver Community College, 250 W. Pender St., Room 420. Speakers: -Federico Fuentes, Centro Internacional Miranda. -Jon Beasley-Murray, Professor of Latin America Studies, University of British Columbia. -Andrea Pinochet, Haiti Solidarity BC. -others to be announced
- *March 7, 2:00 pm.* Public Forum: Bolivia and Venezuela's message: 'Change the system, Not the climate!'. Unitarian Church of Canada, 949 West 49th Ave at Oak St. (west of 49th Ave Canada Line station). Speakers: -Pablo Solon, Bolivia's representative at the United Nations and lead spokesperson on climate change at the Copenhagen Summit. -Federico Fuentes, Centro Internacional Miranda