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Socialist Voice #46, May 4, 2005

## **On the Road to a New Society: Venezuelan workers debate workers control of industry and government enterprises**

**By Bill Burgess**

Vancouver, Canada—The working class and its leadership in the Bolivarian movement of President Hugo Chavez is making huge strides in its efforts to forge a new country based on human solidarity and social justice. That’s the conclusion I draw after returning from two weeks observing political and social life in Venezuela.

I was a participant in the delegation from the Vancouver and District Labour Council that attended the Third Global Gathering of Solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution. The gathering took place in Venezuela from April 13 to 17 and featured numerous workshops and plenary sessions in which Venezuelans active in the social transformation of their country heard reports and discussed the most pressing social and political challenges facing the country. International delegations like ours had the privilege to observe those sessions and add our points of view.

I was particularly impressed by a three-day, roundtable discussion in the city of Valencia on “The Role of Workers in the Management of Companies”. It was organized by Venezuela’s new, pro-revolution labour federation, the UNT (National Workers Union), and attended by about five hundred union members. The UNT unions strongly support the Chavez government. They are backing its efforts to extend social programs and land reform and to foster producer coops and “endogenous” economic development (economic programs that use and promote resources in Venezuela).

[In our Documents section: A translation of the final resolution approved by participants of the roundtable.]

UNT members are increasingly taking up the cause of workers control over state-owned enterprises. The term most often used during the roundtable was “co-management” of enterprises, but it was clear to me that the direction of this movement is toward “workers control”, that is, a management of enterprises in which workers have a decisive voice.

Federation of Electrical Workers’ leader Angel Naves told the roundtable that enterprises under workers control must serve their surrounding communities and society at large. He argued that the union movement should reject any notions that such enterprises belong only to the workers employed. The final resolution approved by the roundtable characterized the co-management as “Bolivarian, revolutionary and anti-capitalist.”

The remarkable experience of oil workers in keeping that vital industry running during the lockout by oil company managers in December 2002 and January 2003 was an important experience related at the roundtable. The workers were able to restore production in several key refineries, and the bosses strike failed to drive the government of President Hugo Chavez from office. Although the oil workers did not institutionalize a direct participation in the direction of the state-owned oil company PDVSA, some 400 striking managers were dismissed. Other speakers said the class consciousness of all workers was raised by the example of oil and other workers who mobilized to keep their workplaces running during the bosses strike. (This contrasted sharply with the old union federation, the CTV, that the UNT has now largely replaced. It supported the bosses strike, and the failed coup against President Chavez in 2002.)

The most extensive experiences with co-management are in the state-owned electrical companies, CADAPE and CADELA, and the state-owned aluminium company, ALCASA. “Co-management” in the former emerged from efforts by the workers to block privatization of the electrical distribution sector. The Chavez government halted the privatizations and appointed union representatives to the companies’ boards of directors. A variety of workplace assemblies and “transparency” policies have been instituted.

Most of the unionists attending the roundtable were electrical industry workers with rich first-hand experience with this process of “co-management”. Loud cheering was common for speakers like Angel Naves when they sharply distinguished their “Bolivarian co-management” from co-management in countries like Germany or Argentina. Naves argued that in the latter, union leaders are simply co-opted into existing management structures and methods.

The co-management process at ALCASA was described by the recently-appointed president of the Company, Carlos Lanz, as a model that the Chavez government intends to implement in all state-owned firms. This one-time guerrilla and self-described Marxist revolutionary explained that newly-created permanent assemblies of workers and managers would have decision-making power over all questions. Lanz and other speakers argued for radical “flattening” of traditional management structures in state-owned companies.

Overcoming the resistance by some wearers of red hats and red shirts (that is, people falsely identifying as supporters of the revolution) was cited repeatedly in the roundtable discussions. Many speakers discussed the need to establish a special school to better equip workers for advanced co-management responsibilities.

Another important experience discussed was occupation of the VENEPAL paper mill by its workers. About 600 of the original 1600 workers took over and operated this mill for several months until raw materials were exhausted. The government nationalized the company in January 2005, and it has now been re-opened as INVEPAL, a joint venture between the state and a cooperative formed by the occupying workers.

This experience paved the way for 100 or so workers at the CNV valve factory that had also been shut down by its coup-supporting owner. The workers occupied the plant and it was nationalized by the government in April 2005. It is now named INVEVAL.

President Chavez has urged other workers to follow the example of the VENEPAL and CNV workers. When announcing the nationalization to the CNV workers, he said that other companies that abandon their factories should likewise be taken over and reopened.

The union at VENEPAL was disbanded when the new INVEPAL was formed, and this was an obvious source of concern for a number of speakers at the roundtable. Similar concerns were raised by Serge Goulart of Brazil, coordinator of the CIPRA and INTERFIBRA occupied factories in that country. He cited experiences of how cooperatives in Brazil had been used to undercut independent unions and to outsource work. Goulart underlined the very positive contrast between the nationalizations by the Chavez government and their inability to convince the Brazilian government to nationalize occupied factories there.

An important feature of the roundtable was a panel discussion by representatives of four different currents within the UNT. A general point of agreement among the UNT currents was the need to extend co-management from state-owned enterprises into the private sector. However, few concrete proposals were offered for how this could be achieved.

One proposal raised in the discussion was for legislation requiring transparency in financial information, that is, to open the company books. The final resolution adopted by the roundtable also endorsed the proposals by the unions in the electrical and aluminium industries for a law to “establish the effective functioning” of the right to “[P]articipation and involvement of people in... social and economic affairs...[through] ...self-management, co-management, [and] cooperatives in all forms” (clauses in Article 70 of the new Venezuela Constitution).

Workers control was a central theme at the May 1 rally and march in Caracas. This was a massive outpouring of support for the government of President Hugo Chavez. Hundreds of thousands of people took part. Many banners and union contingents called for increased self-management of industry and public enterprises. Chants of “Without co-management, there is no revolution” were occasionally complemented with “Without revolution, there is no co-management.”

In his speech to the rally, Chavez said, “We invite all industry to be part of the new society ... we will help every industry to expand production and will provide the funding to do so, however the only condition is that workers be allowed to be part of the management.” Chavez also said if industry was not being used or had been abandoned then the government would move to expropriate them. The aim, said Chavez, was to “move from a revolutionary democracy to

socialism this year ... and that it was critical for political parties to be consolidated in this process.”

A description of the Marxist program for workers control is contained in the *Transitional Program*, the 1938 founding program of the Fourth International. Written by Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, it reads, “...workers control becomes a school for planned economy. On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for direct management of nationalized industry when the hour for the eventuality strikes.”

“The task is one of reorganizing the whole system of production and distribution on a more dignified and workable basis. If the abolition of business secrets be a necessary condition to workers control, then control is the first step along the road to the socialist guidance of economy.”

This is the direction of the discussions and debates I observed in Venezuela. The actions so far by the Chavez government in responding to and promoting the early stages of workers control in Venezuela are preparing the necessary conditions for further encroachments on the prerogatives of capital. I gained the powerful impression that a socialist revolution is under way in Venezuela.

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## **French Referendum Imperils Proposed European Constitution**

**By Roger Annis**

PARIS, FRANCE — On May 29, a national referendum will take place in France on the proposed constitution for the European Union (EU). Beginning in early April, polls have shown the “no” side scoring from 53% to 58%, a trend that has thrown the ruling class here into a panic. It is pulling out all the stops to secure a majority for the “yes.”

The proposed constitution is a voluminous document, many hundreds of pages long, approved in October 2004 by the governments of the EU’s 25 member countries. It details the political, economic and juridical institutions and laws that will govern the future EU.

When polls in March/April began to show dismal results for the constitution’s proponents, newspapers, radio, and television launched a major media blitz to promote its merits.

President Jacques Chirac launched a pro-constitution campaign by going on prime time television on April 14 on a two-hour, town hall exchange in front of 83 hand-picked young people. Opponents of the constitution were excluded from the event.

Chirac’s pitch to his audience was laced with strong doses of French nationalism and chauvinism. “Don’t be afraid!” he told the audience again and again. “Let’s not be afraid of this Europe that is your future.” By rejecting the constitution, he said, “France, at least for a little while ... would stop existing politically inside this Europe.”

“Only our political power at the heart of Europe allows us to defend our interests.”

Chirac warned about the threat to France from other countries, citing “the sudden and unacceptable invasion” of textile imports from China, and Turkey’s stalled application to join the EU. “The values, the way of life, the functioning of Turkey,” he said, “is incompatible with our values.”

Poll results in the days following the program showed that Chirac convinced few people with his performance.

The leaders of the Socialist Party (SP), the party that governed France from 1997 to 2002, have expressed similar alarm. Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former SP minister for the economy, declared, “What is at stake is the future of Europe, the future of France.” The head of the Socialist Party, François Hollande, says, “If the treaty is rejected, we will be left with no constitution at all.”

### **Widespread social unrest**

At the heart of the opposition to the constitution is widespread dissatisfaction and unrest amongst workers, youth and farmers.

France is in the grip of a deepening economic and social crisis. Unemployment exceeds 10%. The government and the employers are carrying out far-reaching attacks to reduce workers' wages and social benefits. Farmers, a numerous social class in France, are protesting declining prices and markets for their products. The quality of education for young people is in decline, and so too are their prospects of finding meaningful employment once they graduate.

In 2002, the governing Socialist Party was tossed out of office because of the growing alienation and dissatisfaction of working people. Its vote in the first round of the presidential election dropped below that of the extreme rightist National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Protests erupted early this year in response to government plans to erode the 35-hour work week that was won under the SP government and to make sharp cuts in social programs such as pensions and health care. Government workers have also been campaigning for a decent wage hike. Hundreds of thousands of workers protested across the country on February 5. Then, on March 10, there was a one-day general strike. As many as one million people marched in cities across the country.

For the past two months, high school students have waged massive demonstrations and school occupations against government plans to divide students into streams at the grade nine level based on test scores. The streaming would make it harder for working-class youth to gain entry to post-secondary education. I encountered several of the student demonstrations while in the streets of Paris in April. Bus transit schedules were often disrupted by student demonstrations that blocked traffic.

“It is intolerable,” said SP leader Francois Hollande recently, “that anger and frustration have risen to this level, referendum or no referendum.”

### **A capitalist constitution**

Opponents of the European constitution charge that it will bring in its wake a downward pressure on wages and living standards in the wealthiest countries toward that of the poorest. The differences in living standards between EU member countries are widening quickly as its membership expands eastward.

The values and rights that the proposed constitution spells out are those of the private property-based system of capitalism. It sets out many fundamental rights—equality of men and women, freedom from discrimination, and prohibition of the death penalty and torture. These rights are already proclaimed in most European countries, but are subject to the interpretation or whims of judicial or government authorities and are undercut by prevailing social inequality and racism.

Meaningful social and economic rights for the ordinary citizen are absent. So too are guarantees of employment, decent housing, or comprehensive health care and retirement pensions. Instead, the constitution offers such banalities as, “Everyone has the right to engage in work and to pursue a freely chosen or accepted occupation,” or, “The Union recognizes and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life.”

By contrast, the rights of the propertied classes to control their wealth and conduct business are spelled out in great detail.

### **Opponents of the constitution**

Opposition to the constitution in France comprises majority opinion in the working class, and it finds expression in a wide spectrum of political parties.

The largest party in the working class, the pro-capitalist SP, is deeply divided. Polls indicate that 60% of SP members will vote “no.” Another pro-capitalist formation, the Green Party, is also divided.

The reformist Communist Party, which polls about 3% of the national vote, is uniformly opposed. So too are the main parties of the radical left — Lutte ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR). They won 6 percent and 4 percent respectively in the first round of the 2002 presidential election, and 5 percent in a joint campaign in the 2004 election to the French legislature.

The National Front also opposes the constitution, and this has been the source of much criticism of left-wing proponents of the “no.” Its leader, Le Pen, won 18% of the vote in the runoff (second) round of the presidential election in 2002. The far right uses Turkey’s application for EU membership to stir up racist and chauvinist opposition to the European Union.

LO and the LCR have contrasting roles in the campaign leading up to the May 29 vote.

Lutte ouvrière believes there are no large stakes for workers in the outcome. It advocates a “no” vote, but does not participate in the meetings and campaign activities of constitution opponents.

“Even if the constitution is rejected,” a recent editorial in its newspaper stated, “the machine that enriches the small minority of privileged, and impoverishes ever more the mass of the poorest people, will continue to function.”

The LCR, by contrast, is playing a leading role in organizing rallies and street and workplace leafleting against the constitution, both in its own name and together with other working class parties and middle-class forces. The largest LCR meeting to date drew 2,000 people in Paris on April 8.

### **LCR campaign**

An 18-page campaign brochure of the LCR is headlined, “For a Europe that is social, democratic, pacifist, environmentalist, and egalitarian: ‘No’ to the (neo)liberal constitution.” It states, “Chirac ... is putting to a vote the policies of social regression. He wants approval for a Europe of military power integrated into NATO and subordinate in all fields to the laws of the market and competition.”

The brochure refutes the claims that the new constitution will promote progressive social policies and peace in Europe and the world. It advances a program of immediate demands that address the social ills plaguing France today, including measures to tackle high unemployment; defense of the rights of immigrant and other workers; and calls to end the degradation of the natural environment. The program also addresses pressing international issues, calling for elimination of

the debt owed by Third World countries to the banks in the imperialist countries. It advocates unilateral disarmament by the French state and calls for a “Socialist United States of Europe.”

Missing from this extensive program, however, is an indication of the road that can lead to socialism. It does not identify the working class as the fundamental force that can lead the battle for socialism. Nor does it explain that a government of the working class movement and parties is the key political force that is needed to replace the capitalist government and proceed to a reorganization of society along socialist lines. It leaves unanswered the question of whether capitalism can be gradually reformed into socialism.

For example, the brochure calls for an “egalitarian Europe” to lead a negotiation process for disarmament throughout the world. Yet, history teaches a compelling lesson—the capitalist classes will never agree to disarm their armies, nor will they yield peacefully to the political will of the majority of society. So what social forces will make disarmament happen, and how?

### **Positive examples**

There are several, living examples in the world today of peoples who have embarked upon the road to socialism. Their experiences would do much to bolster the “No” campaign of the radical left in France.

The people of Venezuela approved a historic constitution in 1999 in a revolutionary political process led by President Hugo Chavez and his Bolivarian political movement. That constitution enshrines not only fundamental political rights, but social rights as well. And it spells out the responsibility of government to uphold such rights.

Its preamble reads, “The essential purposes of the state are the protection and development of the individual and respect for the dignity of the individual, the democratic exercise of the will of the people, the building of a just and peace-loving society, the furtherance of the prosperity and welfare of the people ... Education and work are the fundamental processes for guaranteeing these purposes.”

A key element in the approval of this constitution was the participation of significant numbers of people in Venezuela in the debates and framing of its clauses.

In Cuba, the working class is the decisive political force in the country, and together with other social classes it has created a profoundly progressive society based on social justice and international solidarity. There, too, its constitution contains not only abstract phrase. It codifies the predominant role of the working class and small farmers in the economic, social and political life of the country.

A victory for the “no” in the referendum in France will bolster “no” forces in other European countries due to vote, such as the Netherlands on June 1 and the United Kingdom in 2006. It will also encourage, and give new impetus to, the working class and student resistance to the French capitalists’ drive against living standards and the social wage.



Europe's rulers are on a course to forge a new, imperial Europe, in which a new constitution is one of the important pieces of the political edifice they need to create. They are facing working class and popular opposition every step of the way.

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## **Humanity Has a Yearning for Justice!**

**By Fidel Castro**

*Speech given by Fidel Castro Ruz, president of the Republic of Cuba at the International May Day celebration in Revolution Square on May 1, 2005.*

(Cheering)

Listen, hold on for just a bit longer, because today you will be lucky and I won't be speaking at great length.

(Cheering, and shouts of "No!") Nature is on our side, look at the breeze and the clouds; everything is on the side of our noble cause.

Dear personalities and fighters from more than 60 nations who are sharing this historic May Day with us;

Dear delegates to the 4th Hemispheric Meeting of the Fight Against the FTAA and for the ALBA;

Dear fellow Cubans:

Faced with the most powerful empire in the history of humanity determined to destroy our identity as an independent nation in the past, and later during the inevitable Revolution, we are here, in this glorious Square, after 46 years of heroic struggle, against which the most perfidious defamation and the most vulgar crimes have crashed.

Ninety miles away from that Power, Cuba is committing, and will continue to commit – don't let there be any doubt about this – the sin of existing

The fallacies of asymmetric warfare that Cuba is supposedly preparing to wage are looking increasingly ridiculous, embarrassing and impotent; the great lie about the production of biological weapons, involving the enraged liar John Bolton, whose cynical façade they try to present –and rightly so, perhaps– as the perfect symbol of the current United States government to the United Nations

They have failed in their renewed ideological war in which they invaded or tried to invade our radio electronic space with a host of subversive broadcasts of anti-Cuban radio and television; as they have failed in their attempt to internationally isolate Cuba; in their support of idle mercenaries and their use as Trojan horses within the country; in the vulgar actions of the Interests Section under an agitator especially chosen and trained to work out his own expulsion with a well deserved kick up the backside; and in their intentions to suffocate us with the intensification of the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade.

On the other hand, Cuban credit has grown stronger, its international economic relations have increased and business with US agricultural producers has expanded, despite the many obstacles imposed by the fraudulent and tricky occupant of the White House.

The maneuver to deprive our country of the dollar also failed –the dollar has now been dishonorably dismissed from our country where, during the very harsh times of the special period, it reigned as the Louis XIV of monetary circulation.

All their aggressive plots against our people have failed. Here we are, I insist, stronger than ever, more united than ever, more determined than ever to continue with the exceptional work of building a more just, more supportive, more humane and more prosperous society, like the Promised Land already within our grasp.

The American government, along with its many other sinister strategies to harm our Homeland, resorted to the vulgar option of adding Cuba to a spurious and cynical list of terrorist countries.

This week that draws to an end today, the State Department republished its updated list. It states, in a perverse and malicious way, that: “Cuba remained actively opposed to the US-led Coalition prosecuting the global war on terrorism”.

Why does Cuba have to follow the lead of a corrupt and genocidal government?

Following September 11, 2001 and the atrocious attacks on the Twin Towers, planned and carried out by fanatic leaders financially linked to the dynasty that currently reigns in the White House, individuals who were also trained and used by the United States Special Services, the empire’s policy has centered on what it described as a world crusade against the terrorism which, invented by them against Cuba, Viet Nam and other countries, has become a world tragedy. The Nazi doctrine of the preemptive and surprise attack on ‘any dark corner of the world’ was declared and 60 or more states were grotesquely cited as possible targets – one of these, of course, was Cuba — as our country is first on the list of possible objectives.

No one should be surprised if with the deepest contempt we use the harshest words to qualify such ethylic and demented threats, as it was under such pretext they embarked on wars supposedly aimed at fighting terrorism.

On the very September 11, 2001, Cuba warned of the absurdity of this concept and advised that war would never be the solution to the problem.

Reports from the US Counter-Terrorism Center at this time show that in 2004 there were three times more major terrorist acts (651 compared to 175) than in 2003.

When the American government unjustifiably invaded Iraq, it consciously lied about the existence of weapons of mass destruction. Actually, it was the oil they were after; it was a vulgar war of conquest. All the painful evidence has quashed Bush’s hypocritical speech that the world is now a safer place than it was four years ago.

What is the credibility of the shameless scarecrow designed against Cuba by the State Department, which has also made the mistake of giving first place on their list to the least fearful country and the most capable of uncovering their despicable lies?

On top of all this, the government of that country has been foolish enough to say that “the biggest cause for concern is that these States (including Cuba in first place) have the capacity to produce weapons of mass destruction and other destabilizing technology which could fall into

the hands of the terrorists”. This at the exact time when John Bolton, the deranged author of this folly, is questioned by several of the most important intelligence services of the United States for venting his fury on some honest officials who had the decency to oppose his depraved and untenable lies. Major media outlets and what is even more worrying for the extremist, warmongering and genocidal mob, the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are amazed at such shocking behavior.

The sinister aims of these lies are well known.

In addition to this hysterical behavior, on Friday April 29 a cable reported that the very distinguished President of the United States had just ordered the Treasury Department to hand over a generous amount of Cuba’s frozen assets to meet another lawsuit from the extremist and terrorist Cuban American mob in Miami.

What is truly incomprehensible and inexplicable about the US government’s behavior is that they published the abovementioned State Department document at a time when the current administration is caught up in one of the most embarrassing and sensitive chapters of its terrorist adventures, its aggression and lies against Cuba. Are they stupid, or what?

The whole world knows that Luis Posada Carriles, the cruelest, most famous terrorist in the western hemisphere, as acknowledged by the most important media outlet in this part of the world, has entered the United States and requested asylum from the government of that country, whose soldiers are dying every day and whose death toll have risen to almost two thousand, in the name of a war against terrorism that was unleashed after the events of September 11, 2001.

Our fellow Cubans, who have closely followed this unprecedented scandal, know perfectly well what I am talking about. Many people will now be wondering whether the George W. Bush administration has given birth to the monster that was growing heavy in their entrails. Reply: it is incredible but there are still no signs of labor, despite the fact that this could endanger the health of both, the mother and the creature, as well as that of the many midwives and others who are meddling in this affair, and whose numbers are growing by the day.

Due to the fact that over the last three days we have been focused on the agreements and documents signed between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Cuba, and particularly on the events related to the visit of the leader of the Bolivarian Revolution, our close brother Hugo Chávez Frías, and the historic progress which we are rapidly making in such a short period of time towards the integration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean — two hundred years after their struggles for independence first began — the same that until now have been dominated and plundered by colonialism and imperialism which have lead them to a now unsustainable situation, we haven’t been able to examine the highly significant situation created by the return of the monster to the place where it was bred and trained for the long series of crimes that it has committed against the people of Cuba and other peoples worldwide.

Today, while we were speaking of the crime committed on October 6, 1976 in Barbados, with the blowing up of the passenger plane and the loss of more than 70 lives; between that date and the day the young Italian was murdered in a Havana hotel, 20 years have passed equivalent to 20

years of murders, of crimes committed by US governments using mercenaries and terrorists of the despicable caliber of Posada Carriles.

Neither can we forget more than 45 years of aggressions, mercenary invasions, piratical attacks, acts of sabotage, a dirty war which, in the midst of an atrocious and pitiless blockade, has taken the lives of thousands and thousands of fellow countrymen, victims of these acts of terrorism. How can the US government, least of all the present administration, accuse Cuba, the victim, and write her first on a list of terrorist nations, when what they should actually do is place her first on a list of victims of imperialist terrorism, for more than half a century! (Cheering)

Since it has been almost 72 hours without news on the delivery, I shall proceed straight to giving you, as briefly as possible, –and taking into account the time and the effort you have all made over the last twelve hours– the latest top stories:

The newspaper, *El Nuevo Herald* reported on April 29 that, faced with the extradition request made by Venezuela, the terrorist's accomplices were preparing to strengthen their legal team.

Santiago Alvarez, the well-known terrorist and accomplice of Posada Carriles, said that the legal representation “is being strengthened with lawyers of different origins”.

According to the newspaper, the lawyers hired to assist the terrorist include Kendall Coffey, the former Miami district attorney who led the sinister team of lawyers that tried to keep the child Elián González kidnapped and Joaquín Chafardet, an equally mobbish lawyer who is well known in Venezuela, and who previously represented Posada during his trial in Caracas for the bombing of the Cubana airliner and is strongly associated with Ricardo Koesling, a representative of the Cuban American National Foundation in Venezuela and one of the instigators of the siege of the Cuban Embassy during the ephemeral coup d'état of April 11, 2002.

Accounts cited by the newspaper discuss the possibility that the illustrious Posada Carriles will talk to the press very soon.

Santiago Alvarez Fernández Magriñá, the abovementioned character who took Posada Carriles from Isla Mujeres to the city of Miami between the 16 and the 18 of March, in other words 44 days ago, gave an interview yesterday on a Miami TV channel in which he shamelessly said that Posada Carriles ‘is fine, he is painting, listening to the news and reading’. Then he went on to announce in a language that befits the ignorant and uneducated individual that he is that “it is very probable that in the next few days he will be called to the Immigration office, and when he shows up there they will have to see him and talk to him. Preparations are being made for him to give a limited interview in the next few days, as soon as the lawyers feel that the time is right, in order to give information on certain points that need answering”. In fact, there are a million points that need answering: are you well aware of that, Mr. George W. Bush?

According to the Herald — which as you know has many connections with the Mob, I particularly refer to the so called the New Herald — sources in the United States capital affirmed that Posada's asylum request had gone down like a “lead balloon” in high US ranks. “It has created a lot of political friction”, said a top official that asked to remain anonymous. “This is the

worst time that it could have happened.” Listen to that official’s phrasing: “This is the worst time that it could have happened.”

Information received suggests that the Bush administration doesn’t know how to get out of this tangled and embarrassing situation. They’re holding a time bomb in their hands. While they have been playing with terrorism, fomenting it, supporting it and nurturing it, it comes as no surprise that they now have a time bomb on their hands.

It has also been said that even the beleaguered Cuban American National Foundation, the group that gives the most protection and financial aid to Posada Carriles, in close coordination with US administrations, is worried because this matter could further harm their battered political image, and they are also worried that the terrorist may demand more from them because he has lots of information.

On the other hand, there are reports in New York press circles that the United States government is involved in intense negotiations with several Central American countries in order to secretly transfer the terrorist to any country in that area.

In addition to this it has been said that the Salvadoran government must have let the United States know through various channels that they don’t want Posada Carriles in their country — everybody wanting to get rid of the corpse, acting like rats fleeing a sinking ship — and it is very unlikely that they’ll accept the terrorist. The final destination will depend on the pressure exerted by the State Department. We already know what results have been obtained by that distinguished lady who is the Secretary of State and who is presently traveling through our hemisphere to discuss democracy and lack of governability, or should I say governability, in this hemisphere. They haven’t even realized what has happened, they haven’t even realized that in one week, just one week, three governments are in the middle of serious crises.

Journalists are commenting that Cuba’s denunciation of Posada Carriles took the US authorities by surprise, but that they have by now realized the sensitivity of the issue and changed their initial intention of accepting Posada into their country.

Here, one of the distinguished speakers preceding me – it was Schafick — spoke of the ‘hot potato.’ Cubans know very well how hot a potato can be when it is taken out of the pot, perhaps out of the pressure cooker: it burns your hands, your lips, your tongue, it burns everything; and there they are, with a specially hot potato that won’t cool down, one that we won’t let cool down. (Applause)

Meanwhile, there are reports from Salvadoran political circles that some leaders of the ARENA government party would find themselves in deep water if they didn’t help Posada.

In this context, the former Minister of the Interior and coffee entrepreneur Mario Acosta Oertel, “a close friend of Posada and the people of Miami” would be the person in charge of handling the issue of the terrorist in El Salvador. Acosta’s wife is the cousin of Otto René Rodríguez Llerena, the terrorist detained in Cuba.

According to journalists from an important US television network, their colleagues in Miami say they are convinced that Posada Carriles is hidden in a house in Florida.

Reporters from this network in Miami believe that the FBI knows where Posada is and who is with him, and they don't rule out the possibility that one of the options might be to force him out of the country. To this end, they could use the procedure of accusing the person who is sheltering him, and those who allowed him to enter, and those who gave permission for his entry, and those who know how he entered and where he hiding and are saying nothing.

They say that they don't understand why the FBI has not arrested Posada, since the terrorist was singled out as a fugitive of Venezuelan justice by a government preceding that of President Chávez.

However, they say that they couldn't send him to Venezuela either because the American government is convinced that that would be tantamount to handing him over to Cuba.

Such sophistry! It was precisely Cuba that, from the beginning, relinquished its most legitimate right to judge him since it was her sons and daughters, in huge numbers, who have been among the victims of this monster's crimes, a monster bred and trained in the United States and used by them for decades. If not, how could it be explained, or rather, how could the shameless blackmail plaguing the most powerful superpower ever existing be explained?

It is the opinion of the reporters that the FBI are carefully evaluating the scenarios to which they are being exposed, and they feel that the Bush administration still hasn't decided how to deal with the case—they are truly mute, paralyzed, puzzled—but they assume that when Posada enters into the public eye the FBI will have a plan ready.

TV journalists in Miami are saying that the big networks in the United States are on Posada's trail and some of them are very close to finding out his whereabouts. One version of events is that he is hiding out in an exclusive neighborhood on the outskirts of Miami, in a very expensive house valued at three million dollars. There he spends his time reading, listening to the news and painting, like a new Picasso; there in the lair of the Empire whose political and cultural ideal, at least that of the present administration, is to have painters with blood-stained hands and with the barbaric notion: 'We put the bomb, so what?', or in that infamous phrase used to describe the case of the young Italian Fabio di Celmo: 'He was in the wrong place at the wrong time'. It now seems that it is he, as well as the US government or the President of this administration, who are in the wrong place at the wrong time. (Applause)

You can see what 180,000 people working in the Department of Homeland Security, those 22 bodies that cooperate and participate in their anti-terrorism struggle and in the protection of US internal security, have not been able to accomplish; neither have the 15 intelligence agencies working on a budget of billions of dollars; what these have not been able to accomplish or discover, the US media will succeed in accomplishing and discovering.

They also say that the FBI is not keeping watch on the area where Posada is supposedly staying, and that Eduardo Soto, the terrorist's lawyer, has opted to give his statements and public interviews to Hispanic television channels, without realizing that Posada has now become a priority target for the majority of the country's TV channels, that are starting to work towards finding and filming him, and that if the FBI doesn't find him, the television networks will.

In a recent letter republican Senator Norm Coleman, confirmed that the US Department of Homeland Security had received a request for asylum on behalf of Posada Carriles.

You might recall that a few days ago the University of Informatics Sciences (UCI) had been looking into the obligations of a lawyer or any other person who is filing a plea for exile, and found out that it is a crime punishable by several years in prison to violate these procedures. What would the law say about those holding high office, indeed very high office, who act as accomplices for the cover-up, or are accomplices of that terrorist when they allow or authorize his entry, or even worse, those that allow his entry without any previous consent? And there you have a government paralyzed for a month and a half, incapable of arresting the terrorist and all of his minor accomplices who bypassed the orders of higher authorities.

The Senator's letter means that there is finally news of a zealously guarded document that we have been eagerly looking for over the last few days.

What does this letter say exactly?

*"Dear Mr. Hughes:*

*"Thank you for taking the time to contact me concerning Mr. Luis Posada Carriles.*

*"As you may know, Mr. Carriles was pardoned by Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso on August 26, 2004. Mr. Carriles attorney has alleged that Mr. Carriles entered the United States through Mexico a few weeks ago.*

*"I have shared your concerns with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).*

*"DHS has confirmed that Mr. Carriles attorney has filed an asylum request for his client. However, because of his past acts of terrorism that he has, by his own admission, claimed to have planned and carried out, Mr. Carriles is not eligible for asylum.*

*"DHS cannot confirm Mr. Carriles entry into the country, but has alerted all major law enforcement agencies of his possible presence."*

If they want to find out, all they have to do is to find Mr. Santiago Alvarez, the man who brought him by boat to Miami from Isla Mujeres. They could never deny that, they must swallow the whole nightmare, but this is not a nightmare; it is an irrefutable and indestructible truth. They could have found out where this creature was in five minutes, in the country where the authorities, the special services and the government had spawned him.

The Senator continues:

*"...If he is found, Mr. Carriles would face immediate deportation from the United States for his past terrorist activities.*

*"Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me. I value your advice. If I may be of further assistance to you in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me again.*

*Sincerely,*

*Norm Coleman, United States Senator"*



In the next few days, we will be receiving very interesting news. The US government, blackmailed by the crows it created, has lacked the courage to pursue the only path left to it: the immediate arrest of Posada Carriles, abiding by national and international laws and placing him at the disposition of the Venezuelan Court that must put him on trial. I have already said that Cuba has relinquished its right, just so that they will not have a minimum excuse.

In Venezuela there is a Bolivarian government that is respected worldwide, where there are many journalists. Would that not be the best place to put him on trial, since Cuba won't do it? What excuse can they come up with to avoid sending him there?

We have even proposed that Venezuela is in the best position to do so. We would even accept an international absolutely impartial court, convened in a location where they might agree to try this murderer. This is not even an important individual; the importance of this individual lies in the fact that his presence reveals to the world the immense hypocrisy, the lies, the immoral acts and the cynicism that the Empire uses to dominate the world. This is what's important, let's not forget it. The world demands that injustice be put on trial; the world demands that hypocrisy be put on trial; the world demands that these imperialist methods of deceit and domination, a domination that is harder and harder to maintain on the world, be put on trial.

I promised not to talk at great length; it only remains for me to thank our speakers. (Applause)

We were afraid that this event would go on for too long. We realize that this is summer, the sun is strong and the people began to mobilize, those close to Havana, at 10 o'clock last night, and that at 2 in the morning they were already on their way, so that we might bring together a million three-hundred thousand people, all of whom are not readily visible here, because all the empty spaces and avenues around this Square are filled with fellow Cubans.

You all deserve our infinite recognition for your revolutionary and patriotic spirit, for your support of such a just cause, for your dignity and revolutionary spirit; for your quietness and the attention paid to the valiant, moving and eloquent words we have been hearing from all those who have stood on this podium today, to widen our knowledge of the horrors committed by US Imperialism against the peoples of Latin America and whose words have strengthened our self-confidence and resolve that our nations will be free and will unite closely to defend the same common causes we defend here, speaking the same language that we have been hearing here today, even the English language; Because at the end of the day, it will not be too difficult, thinking of those peoples who once struggled against colonialism and who lost many of their sons and daughters in the struggle against fascism, that these peoples will unite with their Latin American brothers and sisters, in the struggle for justice, in the struggle for truth, in the struggle for the survival of our species which is at stake today.

Let us never forget this event. Let us never forget the words of solidarity spoken by our brothers and sisters from the South, the Center and the North. Language will not be an obstacle, because all of us that speak Spanish or Portuguese will learn English, and one day, all those speaking English will learn the languages of Latin America, Spanish and Portuguese. (Applause)

As I told you recently, the main slogan of the mobilization of this May Day has become: 'Humanity has a yearning for justice.' You have proven this here today. (Applause and shouts of: "Fidel! Fidel!")

And looking out onto this huge, unsurpassable and emotional crowd, I remember that unforgettable October 15, 1976 as if it were today, the moment in which we bid farewell to the victims of that monstrous act of terrorism against the Cuban airliner over Barbados, which made me state: "When an energetic and forceful people cry, injustice trembles!"

We shall see!

Long live the 30th Anniversary — which we also commemorate today — of the glorious and exemplary victory of the heroic people of Vietnam, a victory that the imperialists should never forget!

Patria o Muerte!

Venceremos!

(Ovation.)

Socialist Voice #49, May 21, 2005

## **Socialist Voice enters its second year; Launches email discussion group**

**By John Riddell and Roger Annis**

In April 2004, *Socialist Voice* was launched as “a forum for discussion of the principles of Marxism as applied to workers’ struggles today.” Explaining its purpose, we stated:

“The world capitalist system is headed toward economic, social, and environmental collapse. Only the program of Marxism offers an alternative, through a worldwide struggle to overturn capitalism and replace it by socialism and a planned economy.

“The Iraq war, like other challenges before the working class today, pose the need for Marxists and other working class fighters to forge new links across longstanding organizational barriers and rediscuss their tasks in a dynamic and changing context. Promoting this discussion is the purpose of Socialist Voice.”

The path we chose was unconventional in three ways:

- We started not with a political document outlining our analysis, but by efforts to involve ourselves in ongoing struggles and learn from them.
- Our goal was not to found a new revolutionary current but to contribute to a convergence of living revolutionary forces into a common movement.
- We approached existing socialist organizations not as opponents but as allies, trying to lend support to whatever was positive in their activity.

Since then, we have published an issue of *Socialist Voice* about every ten days and have also reprinted many documents of the Cuban and Venezuelan revolution. *Socialist Voice* articles have been republished in more than a dozen other periodicals in several different countries. A look at the topics shows our priorities:

### **Topic / # of Issues**

- Venezuela, Cuba: 9
- Iraq: 8
- Labor, NDP in Canada: 5
- Labor history in Canada: 5
- Haiti: 3
- U.S.: 3
- Quebec: 2
- Russia: 1

- Ecuador: 1

We also accepted invitations to speak at events held by six different socialist organizations in Canada and Quebec on both historical and current topics. We joined with others to organize public meetings for Ian Angus to mark the publication of a second edition of *Canadian Bolsheviks*.

*Socialist Voice* was founded in response to the Iraq war. The war and its aftermath remain the foremost issue in world politics. We will continue to support and follow the course of the resistance to foreign occupation in that country. The February 2004 coup in Haiti which featured a direct and criminal role by the Canadian government, has special importance in the writing and activity of *Socialist Voice* supporters. And we have tried to report on other significant trade union, social and political issues confronting working people in Canada and Quebec.

### **Venezuela's Impact and Example**

The continuing upsurge in Venezuela during the last year and its close alliance with Cuba is an event of overriding importance for all revolutionary socialists. The Venezuelan and Cuban leaderships now stand together in offering a pole of genuine revolutionary leadership to the world's toilers. This enormously positive development creates objectively favorable circumstances for socialist currents long divided by tradition and orientation to come together with new militant forces in "reclaiming socialism," as Hugo Chávez puts it, and in preparing the ground for a united revolutionary movement.

The concept of identifying socialist perspectives in Canada with the revolutionary example of Cuba and Venezuela is not unique to *Socialist Voice*—it is shared by all our friends and collaborators and many more—but it is unique, at this stage, among Canada's organized socialist currents. And this fact has established *Socialist Voice's* reputation among socialist currents in Canada.

The Venezuelan revolution is still at an early stage, and its future evolution cannot be predicted. Nonetheless, its course to this point is a telling confirmation of Marxism, particularly regarding the revolutionary character of the struggle for socialism and the decisive importance of working-class leadership. Venezuela demonstrates anew the importance of building a revolutionary working-class party and has much to teach us about how this process may be begun.

In the light of this experience, *Socialist Voice* reaffirms the historic task of communism—building a revolutionary movement of the working class and its exploited allies to lead the fight for a workers and farmers government that will overthrow the capitalist order in Canada and join the worldwide struggle for socialism. We look to the example of the Bolshevik Party in the early years of the Russian Revolution, the parties allied with it in the Communist International during the time of its first four congresses, and the 26th of July movement and Communist Party of Cuba.

### **SV-Circle: An Email Discussion Group**

During its first year, *Socialist Voice* has formed collaborative relationships with a range of revolutionary activists, including some who are members of established socialist organizations.

*Socialist Voice* needs to go further down this road, becoming a project not of its editors but of a broader range of activists.

We have formalized this change by regularizing the circulation of reports, ideas, and suggestions, including for future issues of *Socialist Voice*, among a range of collaborators and friends of *Socialist Voice*. The two editors will share their discussions and decision-making through an email discussion group, called SV-Circle, inviting comment, criticism, and proposals.

SV-Circle discussion is open. Any participant is free to forward or post elsewhere what they have sent to SV-Circle. However, we observe the movement courtesy of not forwarding and posting the writings of others without their agreement.

Anyone who supports *Socialist Voice* and wishes to take part in SV-Circle should contact the editors. (For our email address, click “Contact Us” in the menu at the top of this page.)

We maintain the supportive and inclusive approach to other left organizations outlined above and accept into SV-Circle members of other currents who support *Socialist Voice*. *Socialist Voice* aims to embrace contrasting viewpoints on many vital political questions.

We make no principle of *Socialist Voice*'s independence. Over the last year, we have considered various possibilities for collaboration with other organizations or individuals. We should continue to seek a broader organizational framework for our work.

*Socialist Voice* does not seek to codify the program and strategy of revolutionaries in Canada. This can only be done through work and collaboration with a broader range of political forces and through participation in major working-class struggles.

As events in Venezuela and Cuba continue to move forward, they provide a stimulus to explain the Marxist program in more and more concrete terms. Meanwhile, the increasing difficulty for Canada's rulers in carrying out their deepening attacks on the working class will provide receptive ground for Marxist ideas and action.

We propose, in summary, to continue with the publication program of *Socialist Voice* as a web newsletter; to expand the range of those who collaborate in different ways in its publication and distribution; to better organize discussion with our friends and collaborators; and to turn outwards and increase our contact with the new generation of socialist fighters among youth and in the working class.

Socialist Voice #50, May 22, 2005

## **Letter to Progressives in English Canada: The Sponsorship Scandal and Quebec Independence**

**By Pierre Dubuc**

*Editors' Note, by Roger Annis and John Riddell. Socialist Voice is bringing to the attention of our readers the following open letter from a noted activist for Quebecois rights, Pierre Dubuc. He is editor of L'aut'journal, a left independentist biweekly newspaper published in Montreal. Dubuc is also secretary of the SPQ-Libre (Syndicalistes et progressistes pour un Québec libre), a new formation of trade union and social movement activists and intellectuals who hope to turn the Parti québécois into a party of social progress.*

*Dubuc argues in his letter that the issue of Quebec independence lies at the heart of Canada's present governmental crisis. He appeals to progressive forces in English Canada to oppose Ottawa's efforts to suppress the desire for independence among the majority of Quebec's population.*

*Socialist Voice agrees with Dubuc on the urgency for progressive forces in English Canada to campaign for Quebec's right to self-determination, including independence. We hope that his appeal will stimulate discussion of the road to unity of working people of both Quebec and English Canada in the struggle against our common capitalist foe.*

*We do not agree with Dubuc's view of an "English-Canadian identity" as a progressive force in politics. Canadian nationalism has always been a reactionary and anti-democratic force in politics in Canada.*

*The letter refers to "English Canada" as one, homogenous entity. In fact, the interests of working people in Canada as a social class place them on a collision course with Canada's wealthy elite. Working people have a burning material and political interest in supporting Quebec independence and opposing such anti-democratic laws as the infamous "Clarity Bill," the federal law that empowers Ottawa to negate the results of future Quebec referendum on sovereignty.*

*Pierre Dubuc's letter is reproduced from [L'aut'journal](#), where it appeared in both French and English*

May 18, 2005

Dear friends,

Those of you who are inclined to reduce the sponsorship scandal to a mere tempest in a teacup have a short-sighted and highly imprudent grasp of the political situation in Canada. If it were only a question of dollars and cents, the sponsorship scandal would no doubt appear almost insignificant compared to that of the firearms registry. However, as the present parliamentary crisis attests, this is above all a political scandal.

Judging from the English-Canadian press, it appears that the wake-up has been brutal for those who believed that the issue of Quebec separation had been laid to rest on October 30, 1995. Nightmare scenarios were evoked: a landslide win by the Bloc in the next elections, followed by a victory by the Parti Québécois and the holding of a new referendum.

Seen from Quebec, we get the distinct impression that “a spectre is haunting Canada” — to paraphrase a famous expression — but rather than communism, that spectre is separatism. English Canada did not take the 1995 referendum too seriously, but that will never happen again now that it knows it could lose. So, the editorialists and columnists wheel out the heavy artillery: Plan B, the Clarity Act. The only thing they haven’t done is brandish the threat of the partition of Quebec’s territory, but that shouldn’t be long in coming.

For those of you unable to closely follow the Quebec political scene, we can assure you that the sovereignty movement is once again on the march. Quebeckers are gleefully tuning in to RDI (Radio-Canada) — a television channel whose mandate is to “promote Canadian unity” — to hear the revelations of the Gomery Commission on the dirty sponsorship money that was intended to combat the “separatists.” Not even all the imagination in the world could have invented such a boomerang effect.

But that is only one aspect — the least important — of what is going on in Quebec. Half-way through its term, the Charest government is already one of the most unpopular in history. Its neo-liberal platform set out to weaken labour and social organizations and to dismantle the Quebec State through privatizations, thus crushing the backbone of the sovereignty movement.

But instead, the Charest government has succeeded in reinvigorating social movements in Quebec. One year ago, 100,000 workers took to the streets of Montreal to mark May 1st. This year, the confrontation increased a notch with the holding of a series of day-long strikes by public sector employees seeking the renewal of their collective agreements. On May 6, over 35,000 teachers marched in the streets of Quebec City.

This spring, nearly 200,000 CEGEP and university students held a strike to protest against the government’s reform of the loans and bursaries program. It was the largest student strike in the history of Quebec, and this in a province with a rich history of student unrest.

The political character of these movements confirms Quebec’s need to have its own social project, a project that can only be realized within an independent Quebec. Quebec sovereignty constitutes the most profound democratic demand of the Quebec populace and stands at the forefront of all its aspirations and struggles. This explains why, in a recent poll, 54% of Quebeckers pronounced themselves in favour of sovereignty.

The social situation in Quebec against the backdrop of the current political crisis in Canada heralds a major confrontation, with all the risks that implies.

### **Canada has been rendered ungovernable**

Since its creation in 1867, Canada has always been torn between powerful conflicting forces, both internal and external. While other federations have evolved toward greater centralization, Canada has always been too centralized for Quebec and not enough for Ontario. Great Britain,

and later the United States, supported the provinces' demands to weaken Canada, a competitor nation.

Historically, federal political parties have played a fundamental unifying role. This has been the case of the Liberal Party, which has traditionally dominated Canadian politics. Whenever the wearing effects of being in power became too obvious, the Conservatives moved in, giving the Liberal Party time to reinvent itself.

In order to move into power, the Conservatives had to ally themselves with Quebec nationalists. Diefenbaker's Conservatives sought the support of Duplessis, while Brian Mulroney's Conservatives benefited from René Lévesque's policy of "beau risque" (worthwhile risk).

But ever since the creation of the Bloc Québécois in 1990, following the failure of Meech Lake, whose aim was to repair Pierre Trudeau's 1982 constitutional coup de force [forcible takeover or "putsch"] by bringing Quebec into the Confederation "with honour and enthusiasm," there has no longer been the possibility of an alternative to the Liberals in the form of a majority Conservative government with a base in Quebec. \*

The struggle between Conservatives and Liberals — and the financial groups they represent — is now being waged within the Liberal Party, with the consequences we all know. The Liberal Party is in tatters and will be crushed in Quebec ridings with a francophone majority in the next election.

Consequently, Canada is at risk of winding up with an Italian-style government — that is, a succession of minority governments without a solid base in Quebec, that are prepared to sell out the country in order to stay in power — as Paul Martin is currently doing — thus feeding the centrifugal forces that are tearing this country apart.

Canada has been rendered ungovernable and only a major reform based on the hypothesis of the accession of Quebec to sovereignty can provide a possible way out of the current crisis. English-Canadian progressives must abandon all hope of satisfying Quebec's aspirations with vague constitutional reforms modeled on the Meech or Charlottetown accords. Instead, they should start reflecting on the possible shape of a Canada without Quebec and on the possible relations between the two countries.

### **Quebec and Canada vs. the United States — same Struggle!**

Of course, we are well aware that this approach is not presently on English Canada's agenda, and it is with great concern that we apprehend a rise in "Quebec bashing" on the part of federal parties in a desperate bid to win a majority of seats in English Canada.

No one will be surprised if the Liberals decide to make the question of "national unity" a central issue in the next federal election, and we in Quebec recall very well that the Reform Party was the first to brandish the threat of Quebec partition.

However, we have watched with some stupefaction as Jack Layton has climbed up on the Liberal battle horse and accused the Conservatives of allying themselves with the separatists. Is it because Buzz Hargrove recommended that he leave Quebec to the Bloc Québécois that Mr.



Layton now feels authorized to campaign in English Canada on the back of Quebec? The English-Canadian left should call Mr. Layton to order before his remarks poison relations between progressives in both nations.

We understand the complexity of the situation facing English-Canadian progressives and their concerns at the possibility of a Conservative win. We had the same concerns regarding the ADQ in Quebec. But we do not believe that the Liberals constitute an alternative, either directly or through the NDP.

We understand your desire to defend Canadian progressive values against the rise of the American-inspired right and to safeguard the independence of English Canada against its absorption by the United States. In these times of globalization, the protection of the English-Canadian identity is a just cause.

We know that progressives in English Canada still harbour a lot of resentment towards Quebec nationalists, whom they hold responsible for Canada's adherence to the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It is true that this agreement would not have been possible without the Parti Québécois' support of the Mulroney government and that it subsequently rallied Quebec's nationalist elites.

But English Canada too easily forgets that this position was adopted out of vexation following the failure of the 1980 referendum. We must remember that, during this referendum, the government of René Lévesque had proposed "a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations," in order to stand up to the United States. English Canada fought this sovereignty-association proposal tooth and nail, preferring to maintain Quebec in the same state of subjection it has been in since the conquest of 1760.

Today, Quebec is not pro-American, and it is certainly not pro-Bush. The massive demonstrations held in the streets of Montreal to protest against the war in Iraq made this clear in a spectacular way. On three occasions, in the dead of winter, over 150,000 people took to the streets of Montreal while tens of thousands more demonstrated elsewhere in Québec. In proportion to the population, these were the largest protests in the world.

Some day, former Prime Minister Chrétien's memoirs will no doubt reveal that these protests played a crucial role in his decision not to participate in the war. Mr. Chrétien feared that the government of Bernard Landry would take advantage of the opportunity to bring the issue of Quebec independence to the table. Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Landry could not have been unaware that the first motion in favour of independence was tabled in the Quebec National Assembly by J. N. Francoeur during the conscription crisis in 1917.

### **Towards a federalist coup de force?**

We invite progressives in English Canada to undertake a careful analysis of the current political situation. Faced with the present impasse, we cannot exclude a federal coup de force. But this will only accelerate the course of history and raise the issue of Quebec independence with even greater intensity. The hour of truth is near. And the crucial question is: what will be the reaction of progressives in English Canada if Quebec opts for national independence? Will they take the

side of the repressive forces in English Canada or will they support the inalienable right of the people of Quebec to choose their future?

A progressive alternative is inconceivable without the sovereignty of Quebec, and the sovereignty of Quebec opens the door to this alternative.

*\* **Socialist Voice Note:** The federal government's 1982 constitutional "coup de force" consisted of imposing a new constitution on Quebec, with the support of English-Canadian provincial governments but against the strong objections of the Quebec government and virtually every significant social force within the Québécois nation. This unilaterally imposed constitutional setup has never been reversed, and subsequent attempts to make it palatable to Québécois (Meech Lake, Charlottetown accords) have failed.*