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Socialist Voice #217, November 5, 2007

## **Bolivia: A Democratic Revolution Transforming Society**

**By Adriana Paz**

*Adriana Paz is a Bolivian activist, journalist and a founder member of the Canada-Bolivia Solidarity Committee.*

Last March Evo Morales, first indigenous president of Bolivia, instituted in his country a loan to be granted to all children under the age of 12 years living in poor rural communities. During the launching event, Morales approached an indigenous boy and asked him, “What are you going to do now with this money?” The little boy answered “I am going to use it to study because I want to become a president of us like you are.”

Such an answer from an indigenous child would have been unthinkable just a couple of years ago, since the aspirations of the vast majority of indigenous Bolivians were limited to day-to-day survival. This answer thus reflects one of the major transformations taking place in Bolivian society. The arrival of Evo Morales Ayma to the presidency of the poorest country in South America is unquestionably a victory of the people.

Since election of Morales in 2005, Bolivia has seen many important changes, some more visible than others. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the government’s assertion of control over the oil and gas industry has brought the country major economic gains. Agrarian reform has received a new impulse, as idle and illegally obtained land is returned to landless farmers.

Other less tangible changes can be seen in the strengthening of the indigenous population’s pride, self-esteem, and leadership in a country where for more than 182 years a racist colonial system consigned them to subhuman status, death, and historical oblivion.

These deep changes aim not only to reduce poverty and improve economic performance, but also to transform the nation and break with its colonial and racist past.

Today, the Bolivian state – not the government – is facing a critical crisis of hegemony. According to Bolivian vice-president Alvaro Garcia Linera, the crisis has a double structural dimension. On one hand, the neoliberal model imposed on Bolivia by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Washington in the mid-eighties has failed. On the other hand, he says, the elitist, racist, anti-national and anti-social colonial state has exhausted its resources and stands bankrupt.

### **Colonial state under attack**

With the emergence of a new indigenous popular government, the old colonial system, where skin colour and an indigenous last name were grounds for discrimination and exclusion, is now rapidly collapsing. That in itself is a deep social transformation that some have called a democratic revolution. Moreover, the new government is strongly oriented to the defence of Bolivian national sovereignty, through recovering public control of natural resources and land, as well as self-determination for the various indigenous nations that coexist in Bolivia.

These changes go against the interests of the traditional ruling class. They also resist an imperialist agenda that aims to keep Latin American countries subservient to the U.S. and transnational corporations.

And thanks in large measure to Evo Morales and his party, MAS (Movement Toward Socialism), the neoliberal anti-social project has not been consummated. It is more likely that a new nation will soon be born, rather than the old resurrected. For in the 2005 presidential elections, the vast majority of Bolivians (the excluded ones) supported Morales and said “no more” to the old colonial and neoliberal regime.

Raul Prada Alcoreza, Bolivian sociologist, points out the factors at work:

- More than 20 years of indigenous popular resistance against neoliberal policies. Since mid-eighties the indigenous movement and in particular the coca growers’ movement has provided the core of resistance to neoliberalism.
- An historic opportunity for the indigenous population to bring to an end more than 500 years of racism and discrimination.
- The old system’s decline, which became evident in severe social conflicts such as the Cochabamba Water Wars of 2000 and the so-called Gas War of 2003. Both of these dealt resounding defeats to neoliberalism.
- The growing trend across Latin America for national liberation from U.S. and neoliberal domination. Notable examples of this trend are countries like Cuba and Venezuela, and social movements throughout the region, such as the landless movement in Brazil and the Zapatistas in Mexico.

### **The Constituent Assembly: A ship loaded with hopes**

Rosario Ricaldi, one of the MAS Constituent Assembly delegates, explains that the assembly’s goal is to draft a new constitution that takes into account historically marginalized sectors such as the indigenous people, respects their territorial and cultural rights, and ends the colonial state.

For Ricaldi and other MAS members, the new constitution must end all abuses that discriminate against the original people.

The convening of the Constituent Assembly has given rise to a destabilization campaign and an ethnic confrontation that threaten the process as a whole. After a full year of activity, with various interruptions, the assembly missed its original deadline of August 6, 2007, without any significant achievement.

Since its inception, the Constituent Assembly has been plagued by confrontations with a re-emergent right-wing opposition, organized out of the city of Santa Cruz in the east of Bolivia. In Santa Cruz, the wealthiest province in Bolivia, the indigenous population is a minority, while a strong corporate elite is aligned to the oil and gas multinationals and large agribusiness.

For the first eight months, the assembly was deadlocked over rules of procedure and debate, The opposition demanded a two-thirds majority for all votes as a way to prevent radical measures from being introduced into the new constitution.

Once this impasse was over, a combination of factors soon acted to again stall this process. Initially, when voting began within the assembly's 21 commissions over what report to present to the assembly as a whole, the MAS party manoeuvred in a few of the key commissions so that, in alliance with some smaller parties, it could essentially present both the majority and minority reports and lock out the right wing.

Then, on July 2, threatening to walk out of the assembly, the Santa Cruz-based right wing launched its proposed statutes for provincial autonomy, warning that the eastern half of the country would reject any constitution that did not incorporate its proposals.

At the same time, and almost out of nowhere, the demand arose to change the country's capital from La Paz to Sucre (where it had been located until 1898). The protests began in Sucre, supported by the opposition, aiming to create a diversion and heighten tensions. Ricaldi notes that right wing benefits from moving the capital to a city closer to its eastern base and away from the combative social movements predominantly based in the country's west. In response, around 1.5 million people mobilized in La Paz on July 20 to defend its status as the capital.

Congress has set December 6 as the new deadline for the Constituent Assembly's decisions; the measure limits and restricts its powers. The Assembly's sessions are now proceeding in conditions of instability, since it is constantly threatened by rightist destabilization.

### **For a pluri-national state**

Perhaps the most contentious issue before the Constituent Assembly is the MAS proposal to define Bolivia as a state that is not merely multicultural but pluri-national. This concept includes autonomy of indigenous communities, proposed as a counterweight to the right wing's regional autonomy.

Regional or provincial autonomy is a proposal presented by the right-wing opposition. The opposition movements are basically composed by elites of associations of private entrepreneurs and Civic Committees located in the eastern half of the country.

The elite's regional-autonomy proposal, as Bolivian sociologist and political analyst Prada Alcoreza has noted, is just a pretext to maintain their privileges and control over the land and resources, while subordinating the indigenous, campesino and working-class population through institutional corruption and racism.

By contrast, the pluri-national state recognizes and acknowledges all the indigenous nations that co-exist in Bolivia, with equal status.

Juvenal Quispe, Bolivian journalist and writer, explains that a pluri-national state would create a legal and constitutional framework for a nation of nations, with a single state and territorial autonomy at various levels. The peoples of Bolivia now have an historic opportunity to build their future by going beyond the model of the Eurocentric political theories based on a past of colonialism, exploitation and discrimination, he says.

The elites are responding, as in Venezuela, with a mix of racism and fear, calling for "defense of democratic institutions" from attack by the "authoritarian government" of the "savage and ignorant Indians."

The right-wing de-stabilization campaign in Bolivia is coordinated in large part by the U.S. embassy. The Right's tactic of fomenting ethnic and regional confrontation bears a worrisome resemblance to recent bloody ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, where the new U.S. ambassador, Philip Goldberg, was previously posted. The same tactic divide-and-rule tactic lies at the heart of U.S. strategy in Iraq.

Imperialism will not surrender its "back yard" without a fight. The U.S. continues its energetic support of right-wing opposition groups and allies in Bolivia and other dissenting Latin American countries, with the threat of direct military intervention never far away. These efforts are backed up by coordinated media campaigns in North America seeking to demonize Latin American liberation movements and prepare public opinion for intervention.

### **Agrarian reform**

The pluri-national state and the autonomy reforms, whether proposed by the indigenous or the elite, hinge on ownership and control of land. According to Silvestre Saisari, leader of the Landless Movement, "Land is a centre of power. Whoever has the land has the power. We proposed the re-distribution of the land so the power of the elite will be affected."

The opposition, composed of diverse elite and corporate interests, and the so-called "civic committees" in the east, are working to destroy the Constituent Assembly and government to preserve their control over the land.

Nevertheless, outside of the arena of the Constituent Assembly, the government has achieved amazing progress in conducting a real agrarian reform. In November 2006 the MAS government passed a reform bill for the effective distribution of unused land to landless farmers.

In Bolivia the 70% of the land belongs to the 5% of the population, an injustice that has fuelled protest since Bolivia's revolution of the 1950s.

An agrarian law originally passed in 1996, after many years of massive and historical marches demanding recognition of indigenous land, authorized the state to expropriate lands not being used productively. However, as journalist Pablo Stefanoni notes, in practice the titles given to indigenous communities allowed only one owner, causing internal disputes, breaking with the indigenous communal land practices, and disrupting traditional land-based cultural organization.

The old agrarian law also allowed landowners to keep their unused lands if they paid a 1% property tax on the land's value – and landowners themselves determined this value.

The government has now legislated the necessary changes to the old law, and its Land and Territory commission has announced that in the next few weeks the principles of this law will be elevated to the constitutional level.

According to Miguel Urioste, president of Tierra Foundation in Bolivia and long-time advocate of agrarian reform, the new regulations grant government agencies power to identify large land estates and re-distribute them without compensation based on the soil's productivity and the needs of the landless campesino and indigenous people.

This historical achievement was possible thanks not only to the political will of the Morales administration, but also to the pressure and mobilizations of the social movements that marched from different regions of the countryside to La Paz demanding Senate approval of the bill.

Unlike with past marches, this time participants were not met in La Paz by military and police bullets and tear gas, but by communal kitchens with food and water for the protesters.

### **The invisible effects of the revolution**

Bolivia's first presidency by an indigenous person is a revolutionary fact that is modifying public opinions on politics and state authority. "It's a feeling of a political takeover by the people" says Beatriz Vaca, a campesina woman who now works at the micro-credit vice-ministry. "Being an indigenous person is ceasing to have a negative connotation. On the contrary, it is becoming a source of pride both in and out of the country," adds Vaca.

The trend is toward a revolutionary process that transforms society and its power relationships. The people have an opportunity to build a new and revolutionary form of power.

Of every 10 people in Bolivia, almost seven are extremely poor; of those seven people, four are indigenous. As President, Morales represents not only indigenous people but the poor that have taken over the government.

In an interview in *Bolivia Rising*, Mario Guzman Saldaña, Bolivian ambassador in the USA, points out that President Morales and Chancellor David Choquehuanca and other indigenous leaders in the government are teaching those of us who are not indigenous how to live and understand things, in different way.

First, Saldaña says, "There is a clear decision, through the people, their government, and the state, to change the direction of our history – for example, through the recovery of our natural resources." The other key factor, Saldaña says, is to understand that humans must establish a different relationship with nature.

The president and the chancellor, says Saldaña, often speak of "living well," which from the indigenous point of view means an open relationship with nature, considering even trees and rocks as important beings. Rituals and ceremonies have been introduced that previously had been performed only in indigenous communities.

When the vice-president, Alvaro Garcia Linera, was preparing to visit the United States, an Aymara ceremony was held for him in the presidential palace – for the first time in history – blessing his journey and bestowing good wishes upon his mission. Also President Morales, as one of his first acts upon nationalizing an industry, made a special offering to Pachamama (Mother Earth).

Colonialism and neoliberalism tried to relegate the indigenous world to the trash can of history. Now through its growing influence, a new renaissance is around the corner.

This influence can also be seen in other political developments such the new water ministry and new water law which respects indigenous' ancestral and traditional ways of water management. The judicial system now acknowledges the traditional communal justice system.

### **A ray of hope**

Exciting economical and political developments are taking place in the Andes. Yet they are encountering strong opposition that threatens to overturn what has been achieved until now. However one thing is certain: despite threat, delays, and problems, the courageous Bolivian people won't take a step backward after gaining all they've conquered up to now.

Bolivia's unique democratic revolution is a ray of hope and a breath of fresh air for all the excluded ones in the world. Yet this dream for freedom and dignity is still a fragile process under constant attack – a process that deserves external support and global solidarity.

Socialist Voice #218, November 12, 2007

## **Canadian Government Continues Lies and Cover-up on Afghanistan**

**By Roger Annis**

The Canadian government continues to rely on denial and lies to cover up the criminal war in Afghanistan in which it is an enthusiastic partner.

A damning exposé of the war and Canada's role was published in the Montréal French-language daily newspaper *La Presse* during the week of October 29. The paper published a series of articles by its correspondent in Kabul, Michèle Ouimet, entitled, "Afghanistan: The Failings of the Canadian Mission." It is a withering portrait of the lies and deception that define Canadian government policy in Afghanistan.

### **Torture policy continues**

In the first article of the series, on October 29, Ouimet reported that Canada continues to turn over captured Afghans to torture at the hands of the local police and military with which it is allied. Last April, similar torture allegations surfaced. They put the war's advocates on the defensive. After weeks of denial failed to quell a domestic outcry, the government said an agreement had been signed with Afghan authorities to prohibit future torture of captives turned over by Canada.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded immediately to the latest *La Presse* report, saying "not true," and "Taliban propaganda." Presumably, the government feels that such bald denials are not very costly politically. All parties in the Canadian Parliament agree on a continued Canadian military presence in the country. The New Democratic Party distinguishes itself by calling for an end to Canada's "counterinsurgency" role in Afghanistan.

But the latest allegations, like others before them, are wearing down the benefit of the doubt that a narrow majority of Canadians are willing to give to the government and military.

The rendition policy is being challenged in Canada's federal court by Amnesty International and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association. They are seeking a court injunction to oblige Canada to assume full care and treatment of Afghans who it seizes. The federal government lost a round in this fight on November 5 when the court refused a government request to halt the case.

### **Health care tragedy**

Ouimet reported on October 30 that Canadian officials cannot account for \$3 million that Canada says it has contributed to the main public hospital in Kandahar, Mirwais Hospital.

The Red Cross administers the hospital and does not provide accounts of expenditure. It also prohibits foreign journalists from entering. Ouimet entered incognito. She reported horrific conditions inside, similar to those reported by the Senlis Council and other journalists earlier this

year—no sanitation, lack of basic medications, no available blood products, few medical personnel, and suffering patients.

On May 28, 2007, Norine MacDonald, president of the Senlis Council, an international think tank and aid agency, testified before a committee of the Canadian Parliament and commented on the Council's examination of the Mirwais Hospital. The hospital, located just a few kilometres away from a lavish Canadian military base and supposedly funded by millions of Canadian dollars, was so poorly equipped, she said, that, "it does not deserve the name hospital."

### **Aid fiasco**

On October 31, Ouimet looked at a couple of projects in Kabul that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) says it is funding. One was an \$85,000 project to clean up garbage and debris in the city. The project was contracted to a local Afghan businessman. CIDA says he hired 200 people and successfully completed it. CIDA also says it funded a project to install 340 pre-fabricated cement roadside drainage surfaces.

"Not true," says the mayor of Kabul, Ghulam Hadidi. He says no one told him of the projects.

"I have never seen anyone picking up garbage, and the city is as dirty as ever," he told Ouimet.

"So I ask the question, what happened to the money?"

His officials looked into the cement claim and found the number installed was less than claimed, only 138. The mayor says the city needs 3,800. It found that the cement used did meet the minimum structural standard. But it cost \$20 per piece. The mayor says it could have purchased them for \$4 each.

"It's not easy to work with the Canadians," the mayor told Ouimet. "Their personnel changes all the time."

The mayor's daughter, Rangina, was blunter. "Where are they (the Canadians)? What do they do? We never see them; they sit in their fortified camp."

Ouimet talked to the governor of Kandahar province, and he added his views on foreign aid programs. "Their bureaucracy is so heavy," he said. "The international community does not listen to us. We never succeed in resolving problems."

### **Widespread corruption**

On November 1, Ouimet reported from Kabul in an article entitled, "An Administration Corrupt to the Bone." Her reporting of the UN role is revealing, and particularly relevant to the situation in Haiti where Canada also leads a foreign occupation force.

An aide to President Hamid Karzai told Ouimet, "The international community has injected \$19 billion into Afghanistan. About 95% of that leaves the country. Non-governmental organizations employ 540 foreigners who earn from \$5,000 to \$35,000 per month.

"The last elections cost \$395 million. It was the foreigners who organized them, and kept the money for themselves."



The editor of *Kabul Weekly*, Mohammed Dashty, is harsher. "The UN is a government within a government... Look at their expenditures, the salaries they pay to their employees, their 4 x 4 vehicles that cross the city, their travel abroad. I call that legal corruption."

Ouimet's report sketched a vast scale of corruption within the foreign-imposed Afghan regime.

### **Humanitarian refugee crisis**

The final article in Ouimet's series, on November 3, sketched the profound humanitarian crisis of Afghan refugees. There are two million of them, living in camps along the country's borders or in internal camps. They are the second-largest refugee population in the world, after Palestinians.

Ouimet reported something that would come as a surprise to most Canadians. Most of the 100,000 refugees in Kandahar province, where the Canadian military contingent in Afghanistan is based, receive no food aid. In March, 2006, the governor of Kandahar province and United Nations authorities decided to cut it off. The reason was to force refugees to return to wherever they had come from.

This barbaric decision did not have the intended effect of forcibly relocating refugees. But it did cause more starvation and suffering than was already present. Stung by revelations from the Senlis Council and journalists of widespread starvation in Kandahar province earlier this year, Canada has quietly moved to reduce the political damage. International Cooperation Minister Beverley Oda visited Kandahar city in early October and announced "\$25 million in food aid." The announcement contained no details of where, how and to whom the food would be distributed.

### **War effort faltering**

Amidst all these policy failings, Canada and NATO's war effort itself is faltering. The city of Kandahar, the second largest in the country and the location of a major Canada/NATO base, is slowly being encircled by patriotic fighters, according to the November 1 *Globe and Mail*. On November 6, Canada's minister of foreign affairs, Peter Mackay, narrowly escaped injury from a rocket attack while visiting a forward Canadian military base in Kandahar province.

The Canada/NATO war in the countryside in Kandahar province is also worsening the refugee crisis in the province as thousands come into Kandahar city to escape the fighting.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani military dictatorship, a staunch friend and ally of Canada and NATO, is poised to fall to a popular uprising. Dictator Pervez Musharaf declared martial law on November 3 in an effort to suppress a growing mass movement demanding democratic rule.

### **Antiwar protests decline in size, but not in influence**

Paradoxically, antiwar protests in Canada are growing smaller as the failure of the U.S./NATO war and occupation becomes more apparent. A national day of protest against the war in Afghanistan was held across Canada on October 27. Rallies and marches were smaller than other recent protests. In Vancouver and Toronto, 750 or so protested. Rallies in Montreal and Ottawa drew 200 and 150 respectively, while 100 marched in Edmonton.

But the declining numbers are deceptive. Public opinion polls show a slim but firm majority want an end to the war in Afghanistan. The recent speaking tour to Canada of Afghan parliamentary representative Malalai Joya drew large and interested crowds. Joya condemns the foreign occupation of Afghanistan and calls for an end to the war it is waging.

### **Long war foreseen in Afghanistan**

In its speech opening a new session of the Canadian Parliament on October 16, the Canadian government said it would end the military mission in Afghanistan by 2011. This extends by two years a 2009 date set by the preceding Liberal Party government. The Liberals' original date for ending the combat mission was 2007. The Liberals tacitly supported the new 2011 date by abstaining on an October 24 vote on the speech.

The head of Canada's military, General Rick Hillier, complicated the political farce when he declared that he considers 2017 as the earliest possible date for a withdrawal. Military officials from Britain, which has the second-largest foreign presence in Afghanistan, stated several months ago that they were committed to a decades-long war in Afghanistan.

Canada's rulers have tied the country's future to a brutal and endless war in Afghanistan — a war, moreover, that is but a leading front of a U.S.-led war of conquest in the entire Middle East.

Socialist Voice #219, November 20, 2007

## **Roots and Revolutionary Dynamics of Indigenous Struggles in Canada**

*A Movement for Land and Self-Determination*

**By Mike Krebs**

*Mike Krebs is an indigenous activist in Vancouver and a contributing editor to Socialist Voice. This article is based on a talk given at the Vancouver Socialist Educational Conference in March 2007.*

The indigenous question is one of the most political issues in Canada today – perhaps the most important. There are indigenous struggles going on in many different levels across Canada. There are struggles over land and resources such as that happening up north with the Tahltan nation, who are opposing the mining developments happening on their territory against their wishes. There is the similar situation with the Six Nations, who are opposing the theft of the Haldimand Tract in southwestern Ontario and the development that is going on there.

There are also indigenous people fighting poverty in indigenous communities both on and off reserve. The mainstream media carry many articles exposing what people do or should already know about, which is the horrible conditions that indigenous people are forced to live under in the Canadian colonial society.

Another major issue that indigenous people are dealing with and fighting, is the way that the lives of indigenous women are devalued in the colonial society, and how this leads to such widespread instances of indigenous women disappearing and being killed. This has been an issue in Vancouver with women going missing from the Downtown Eastside and up north along the Highway of Tears, the highway that runs between Prince Rupert and Prince George. This also happens in cities all across the Prairies, especially in Saskatoon. It is an urgent question.

The indigenous struggle for self-determination is a revolutionary struggle. Yet it receives little recognition from leftist activists, currents, parties, and organizations in Canada.

Many groups talk about indigenous struggles or cover them in their publications, but generally reframe these struggles in a way that does not address their revolutionary content. One example of this is the tendency of some left groups to frame the indigenous struggle in Canada as one of an oppressed minority, without taking up the question of land and the question of indigenous people as nations. This approach unscientifically separates the discrimination that indigenous people face from its material base.

The reality is that indigenous people are repeatedly finding themselves on opposing ends from leftists when it comes to leftist theory and practice.

### **Living standards of indigenous people in Canada**

As a starting place for looking at indigenous struggles in Canada, it is important to outline the current conditions that indigenous people are forced to live under. One of the ways to do this is

look at some basic statistics. Here are a few that are taken from a report published by the Canadian Population Health Collective in 2004 called “Improving the Health of Canadians.” This is of course only one way to understand the kind of conditions indigenous people live under, but it gives a general idea:

- More than one-third of indigenous people live in homes that do not meet the most basic government standards of acceptability.
- Average life expectancy for indigenous people is ten years less than the Canadian average.
- Indigenous children die at three times the rate of non-indigenous children, and are more likely to be born with severe birth defects and conditions like fetal alcohol syndrome.
- The suicide rate of indigenous people is six times higher than the Canada-wide average.
- Tuberculosis rates are 16 times higher in indigenous communities than the rest of the population, and HIV and AIDS infection is growing fastest among indigenous people.

We could go on and add to this the high rates of unemployment; the higher rates of being subjected to violence, whether it’s domestic or at the hands of police; the higher rates of incarceration, victimization by sexual assault, child apprehension and the lower level of access to formal education.

None of these statistics should be a surprise to anyone even remotely familiar with the conditions of indigenous people in Canada. These statistics are produced, repeated and exposed over and over again. Indigenous people don’t need to read these numbers to understand our situation, because this is just a basic description of day-to-day life, and this is only touching the surface.

But what’s really important to understand is why indigenous people face these conditions. Without the “why” of things, these statistics are meaningless towards understanding what they are portraying.

The true history of the development of Canada is significant, because the conditions that indigenous people live under today are the result of hundreds of years of the dispossession of indigenous peoples from their lands and resources. They are the result of a genocidal campaign against indigenous people at the hands of Canadian colonialism, and hundreds of years of suppression of the development of indigenous nations.

This process of colonization involved many stages, across Canada and the Americas, and it manifested itself in different ways. Here we are only looking at the general picture.

### **The Royal Proclamation of 1763**

The early colonization of North America involved destroying the traditional societies and economies. This was carried out in the pursuit of the hegemony of merchant, and eventually industrial capitalism.

During the early stages of British and French colonialism, the British produced Royal Proclamation of 1763. This was basically a recognition by the British of the right of indigenous

people to their land. This document is brought up a lot by indigenous people, because it is seen as the colonial government admitting and acknowledging that it cannot and should not take indigenous lands and territories without some sort of consent or arrangement. In terms of Canadian law and the perspective of indigenous people, there has been nothing since then that has revoked the Proclamation of 1763.

But why did the British, at this point, recognize indigenous rights to their lands and resources, and then go ahead and completely ignore them?

There are three major contexts that have to be understood in looking at the Proclamation of 1763. One is the balance of forces that existed at the time between the British and French settler societies and the indigenous population. This is prior to industrialization, and is at a time when indigenous people still made up the vast majority of the population in what became Canada. So the settler society was qualitatively and quantitatively in a much weaker position than it would soon become.

Second, this document was issued during an indigenous insurgency led by Chief Pontiac against the colonial policies of the British, during which several British forts were besieged and others completely destroyed. The British needed to respond to this insurgency, and in issuing the Royal Proclamation hoped to placate the indigenous people involved in this uprising.

Finally, this document was meant to protect the interests of British colonialism against those of French colonialism. This document came out of the French defeat by the British at this time, when the main interest of the British over Canada was the extraction of primary resources, such as furs.

The intention of the document was to prevent further settlement by French settlers on indigenous land. For the British, indigenous territory was little more than a vast hunting ground, that needed to be kept free of settlement. The majority of people who were gathering these resources for Companies like the Hudson's Bay Company were indigenous.

What this all means is that the British had an interest in enshrining at least some rights for indigenous people, as the protection of these rights served the interests of British merchants.

This early merchant capitalism started to slowly have an effect and transform indigenous societies. Traditionally indigenous people were hunting, and in some cases farming, for the purposes of local consumption, or engaging in small-scale trade with other indigenous peoples for tradeable goods. But the influence of the fur trade economy through the Hudson's Bay Company, the French and the British, changed these hunting practices to primitive accumulation of these same goods in exchange for products from the Hudson's Bay Company, and eventually straight for cash.

This created some instances where the development of capitalism, though it was inherently exploitative process, was being carried out with some degree of cooperation between the settlers and at least some indigenous people. This is how the development of the Metis Nation should be understood, as a society comprised of indigenous and settler culture, growing out of this process around the trade of fur and other natural resources.

Understanding the development of the Metis nation is important because it shows that the impending genocide against indigenous people wasn't a necessary part of the development of production in Canada. In this period there was some degree of cooperation, at least from indigenous people, with the settler society, a willingness to co-exist.

But over time, the dominant trend was towards a complete dispossession of indigenous people from their lands and resources.

### **From 'co-existence' to conquest**

As industrial capitalism developed, the importance of the fur trade and other forms of primary accumulation dropped. What became more important was the need to implement private property relations as the foundation for the further penetration of a market economy. This directly clashed with indigenous land rights, because it involved speeding up the transformation of these lands into private homesteads held by non-indigenous people.

This rapid settlement met with a lot of resistance from indigenous people in Canada. There were the Metis and Northwest Rebellions, and numerous battles across what would become Canada, including large-scale resistance by the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations) and by indigenous people along the northwest coast.

These were battles over the land, and also over different conceptions of economic property relations, different conceptions of what the land meant. Indigenous people did have some concepts of ownership. Territories used primarily by a particular indigenous society were belongings of a people, clan, or family. But this is completely different from the European conception of private property that was being imposed in this process.

This process also clashed with the concept that was held by many indigenous people of the ability to co-exist with the people who were coming from Europe and settling there. One of the more well-known examples is the Two-Row Wampum that is still upheld by the Haudenosaunee people. This was an agreement made with an understanding that people were coming from Europe and settling on indigenous lands, but that this land could be shared. Indigenous people and the European societies might live totally separately, and might develop in different directions, but would nonetheless be able to share the territory in a more or less peaceful manner.

But colonialism, in its drive to seize indigenous peoples' lands and resources and to implement private property, left no room for this coexistence whatsoever. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the colonizers had a more advanced army with an entire empire behind it. This was backed up with the divide and conquer tactics that were played out over several generations against different indigenous people, and in many cases the complete destruction of indigenous peoples' traditional economic base. In this context, indigenous resistance to this process was effectively quelled.

Almost all indigenous land was expropriated, and the vast majority of indigenous people were forced onto reservations. In some cases, there was a piece of paper that the government could point to, known as a treaty, so that they could at least claim that they took the land fair and square. For most of the lands in B.C., however, they don't even have this, and by their own admission stole this land outright.

**Cultural assimilation, germ warfare, genocide**

The next major stage in this colonial process going into the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the attempted forced “assimilation” of indigenous people. This was done with the promise of educating indigenous people and “civilizing” them, supposedly in order to integrate us into Canadian society. It should be obvious to anyone familiar with the true history of Canada that this is all completely nonsense.

The first means through which this “civilizing mission” was carried out was the residential school system, which was above all a means of destroying indigenous societies.

The residential school system had the effect of fostering complete self-hatred in most of those who went through it, building a collective psychology within indigenous people in the colonizer’s image. Indigenous people were forced to internalize a conception of themselves as being drunken, lazy, and stupid.

This was done by dislocating indigenous people from their communities, putting children in schools where they were punished for speaking their languages. There was also the rampant, systematic sexual abuse and rape against indigenous people, an experience that has negatively affected the interpersonal relationships of indigenous people and will continue to do so for generations to come.

The second significant part of this attempted forced “assimilation” was government support for economic projects by indigenous people. In many indigenous communities, the government supplied training and resources for people to have their own farming projects, and in other areas, fishing projects, or economic projects of a similar nature.

These were projects that were designed to fail. What was really behind these projects was to promote the belief among indigenous people that they would be able to “make it” in the dominant settler society. (This is very similar to the illusions that are put in the minds of other working and oppressed people, the illusion that in Canada people can become their own bosses and achieve greatness along that path.)

Originally many of these farming and commercial fishing projects by indigenous people were very successful. In the reserve my family is from, Piikani, we were given some of the worst farmland in the area, and yet we were very successful initially in adapting and getting farming going.

But this was happening at the same time as, in our particular case, we lost up to 80 percent of our population in a period of 25 years, basically to biological warfare: deaths from tuberculosis, smallpox, and other diseases. This early farming was also happening when people were being forced into the residential schools, both on and off the reserves.

So of course in this context indigenous people were not able to compete as new players in the growing market economy, and with few exceptions, these indigenous-run farms collapsed.

**Indigenous resurgence and “Red Power”**

These processes dominated the experience of indigenous people up to around the mid-twentieth-century, when there was an upsurge of indigenous resistance. (This is not to say that indigenous resistance to Canadian colonialism ever subsided: it wasn't until 1924 that the Iroquois Confederacy, the traditional government of the Haudenosaunee was forcibly broken up by the Canadian government and the band council system was imposed on those communities.)

The 1960s gave rise to the Red Power movement. This movement was heavily influenced by the upsurge of anti-colonial struggles all over the world, including in Vietnam, Algeria, and Cuba. It was also influenced by the Black Power movement that was a growing force in the USA.

This was also happening when there was a very large migration of indigenous people off reserves and into cities, and it was this population that formed the seed of the Red Power movement.

It is significant to note that many of those involved in this were among the most assimilated indigenous people: very urbanized, with relatively more formal education than previous generations. And yet, despite that, the dominant tendency of the indigenous struggle in Canada and the U.S. at the time and up to the present, has been a national one. The aims and orientation of this struggle haven't been towards struggling for "recognition," for acceptance, for integration, or parity within the Canadian or U.S. society. Instead, the struggle has been against the dominant path of these colonial societies, rejecting the very legitimacy of the existence of these nation states.

This struggle has been coupled with a tremendous revival of indigenous culture over the last 2 or 3 decades. Indigenous people were able to start to learn about the real histories, about their backgrounds. Languages considered "dead" by the anthropologists are starting to return.

This stems from indigenous people having a common understanding of the roots of indigenous oppression: that the Canadian state is an entity of occupation, that it exists at the expense of indigenous people. And the problems that we face today stem directly from this occupation.

### **Indigenous struggles continue**

We are not just talking about land as a historical question either. To this day, infringement on indigenous territory continues and is still deepening. This is happening primarily at the hands of Canadian mining and land development companies. It includes, for example, the territory of the Tahltan Nation, the Six Nations territory near Caledonia, and the logging of Cree territory near Grassy Narrows.

Indigenous people are also trying to stop the International Monetary Fund-style deals that are being forced upon us in the form of so-called "modern treaties." These agreements are an attempt to pave the way for the eventual elimination of the reserve system, which is the last cohesive land base that indigenous people are able to live on.

For this reason, the most pointed indigenous struggles over the last couple decades, the ones that have electrified indigenous people across Canada, have been assertions of indigenous peoples' rights over their lands. These are struggles framed by indigenous people as a struggle over the land that belongs to us as nations. These are happening regardless of the relatively small size of



the indigenous population in Canada. And despite our numbers, when indigenous people assert these rights, it has a huge impact on the overall politics of Canada.

To emphasize the significance of indigenous struggles for land is to present the objective reality in Canada today. It's not to say that indigenous people's movements are completely separate from other struggles going on in Canada, including of course the struggles of working people. The participation of indigenous people in the workforce in Canada is actually a lot higher than the perception. Historically, and up to the present, indigenous people still make up the vast majority of the reserve army of labour. There is large participation of indigenous people in skilled and semiskilled labour jobs, including participation in the construction industry, mining, fishing, logging. There is also a significant amount of indigenous women working in clerical jobs.

In the last decade more and more indigenous people have entered post-secondary schools and middle-class professions: doctors, teachers, lawyers, different types of administrative positions. But none of this has changed the fact that as indigenous people we still frame our struggles mainly as national struggles, and we still see this as the primary battle that we face.

Indigenous people are fighting for the ability to decide what can and cannot happen with indigenous land and resources. We are fighting for real control over the institutions that affect our lives directly: education, the judicial system, community services. Or, in situations where indigenous people have their own living structures, models or institutions, we struggle for these to be respected, and that there be no more attempts to try and destroy them. We are struggling as indigenous people for the space to develop institutions that actually serve our needs.

### **Revolutionary dynamics of the indigenous struggle**

It is essential that other working and oppressed people support these aspirations, and support the right of indigenous nations for self-determination. Their struggle has a revolutionary dynamic that inherently challenges Canadian capitalism. The indigenous question in Canada cannot be solved within the confines of Canadian capitalism. The Canadian government and corporations cannot afford even relatively small concessions, let alone the much larger concessions that would be necessary to allow the space for indigenous communities to solve the numerous problems we face, in a way that is just and in a way that is lasting.

The Canadian ruling class understands this, and this is why they pay so much attention to indigenous struggles. The assertion of indigenous rights challenges the very legitimacy of Canada as a nation-state.

In conclusion, it must be understood that the indigenous struggle in Canada is part of the larger struggle of indigenous people that is unfolding at the international scale. Indigenous people are on the move throughout Latin America, especially in Bolivia, Mexico, and Ecuador. The indigenous struggle in Canada has to be understood as part of other indigenous struggles, like that of the Palestinian people, who have been waging for decades a national liberation struggle, against the occupation of their land by the Israeli Apartheid state. These struggles and their significance must be understood, appreciated, and supported, in order to make revolutionary change, here in Canada and internationally.

Socialist Voice #220, November 5, 2007

## **New Zealand Union Campaigns to Organize Young Workers**

**By Roger Annis**

Melbourne, Australia—Four years ago, some experienced social and political organizers sat down with young people in Auckland, New Zealand to map out a plan for a novel trade union, one that would potentially represent the thousands of workers who toil in poorly paid and mostly part-time jobs in the fast food and other service industries.

When the group approached existing unions with its ideas for such an organizing effort, it was told, “Not possible,” or “Too difficult.” Most workers in the targeted industries are too young and itinerant, or too distracted by consumerism and other vices to think about collective industrial action.

Undeterred, the group launched an organizing drive that would ultimately result in the Unite Union. Today, Unite counts 5,000 members. Of these, 2,000 work in the fast food industry, 600 at the main casino in Auckland, 500 in call centres, and another 700 work in hotels. Most of the union’s members are in and around Auckland, New Zealand’s largest city.

The union is exploring a merger with a larger union, the 20,000-member National Distribution Union. That union is itself undergoing a transformation into a more democratic and fighting organization in the wake of a successful campaign in 2006 to defeat a lockout of 500 workers by the giant Australian retailer Woolworth’s.

Mike Treen, National Director of Unite, gave an interview on the story of the union while attending the Latin America and Asia Pacific International Solidarity Forum America and Asia Pacific International Solidarity Forum here from October 11 to 14.

“We had several things working in our favour when we started the organizing campaign. The unemployment rate was low, so it gave young workers confidence that if things came to worse, they could always move on to another job.

“We also had several features of New Zealand labour law in our favour. The law requires employers to grant union organizers access to the work site. And union recognition is granted to whatever proportion of a workforce wishes to be recognized. All we needed was a minimum of two workers to sign up and we had our foot in the door.”

The union quickly realized that it could not win representation by traditional tactics of industrial action. Treen explained, “Our campaign was above all political. We used a combination of on-the-job pressure tactics and mobilization of broader community support to win union representation.”

“Our central demands were one of the main reasons for our success. There were three—abolish sub-minimum wage youth pay rates; a minimum wage of \$12 per hour; and secure hours of work. These demands became very popular, not only among the workers we were organizing but also among their friends and family and in broader society. ”

Unite's organizing work was anything but traditional. "We bought a bus, decorated it with the campaign material and attached big bullhorn speakers. Then we would use it to travel from one worksite to another and mobilize very loud and visible support outside the workplaces where we were organizing or bargaining. Dozens of short strike were held with the young workers making a real noise on the busy highways and intersections where these fast food outlets are situated."

Treen explained how one company, Restaurant Brands, was organized. It owns Pizza Hut, KFC and Starbucks. "When we launched the campaign, we did it with what we called 'the world's first Starbucks strike'. Because the pizza delivery network had one national call centre, it didn't require a lot of industrial action to put a lot of pressure on the company. We would have a rally outside the call center on a Friday or Saturday night. The call centre workers would come out and take part. Workers could stay for as long as they liked. Some would only stay out for half an hour, some would decide to go home for the rest of the night. The net effect was to back up calls for hours."

The union mobilized unions, workers and cultural performers to support its fight. It organized several big events in Auckland in early 2006 to galvanize support, including a rally on February 12 that filled the Auckland Town Hall followed the next month by a march and rally through central Auckland that drew 1,500 participants.

The union's fast food campaign adopted the popular slogan, "Supersize My Pay." It scored some victories in 2006. Restaurant Brands signed a collective agreement that increased wages, moved youth rates from 80% to 90% of the adult rate, and contained a clause that protected the work hours of existing staff before new staff would be hired.

This agreement was followed by others at McDonalds, Burger King and Wendy's with conditions similar to those at Restaurant Brands.

During 2007, the government was obliged to respond to pressure to abolish youth rates. It decided that youth rates could only last for 3 months or 200 hours. With that change, McDonalds did a joint announcement with Unite that they would get rid of youth rates altogether. Other big employers are now expected to follow suit.

The government has also increased the minimum wage by degree and it is expected to reach \$12 an hour in March, 2008. The union movement is now raising the bar to get a minimum wage of \$15 an hour. This would be equal to two-thirds of the average national wage, which is the standard set by the International Labor Organization.

"This campaign was a big victory for a radical, campaigning unionism," Treen concluded. "It proved young people would join unions in their thousands if asked, and if inspired to do so, by a union willing to fight. Not only did it bring notoriously anti-union employers like McDonald's to the negotiating table, it also forced them to sign a collective agreement and make real concessions."

Unite's story is an inspiring one. If you want to see it in action, you can get a DVD of the campaign called "SupersizeMyPay.Com." It's well worth a look.

Unite web site: <http://www.unite.org.nz/>

Socialist Voice #221, November 28, 2007

## **Next Steps for the Palestinian Solidarity Movement**

**By Adam Hanieh**

*Adam Hanieh is a board member of Palestine House, Mississauga.*

*This an updated version of a talk he gave in Toronto on October 4, at the launch of the book Between the Lines: Readings on Israel, the Palestinians, and the U.S. 'War on Terror' ( Haymarket Books, 2007) edited by Tikva Honig-Parnass and Toufic Haddad.*

The launch of this book is an extremely timely and important contribution to understanding the current situation in Palestine. We all know from the daily reports that this situation is one of the most difficult ever faced by the Palestinian people. In the Gaza Strip, a truly unprecedented assault on the population is unfolding. Over 1.4 million Gazans are trapped in this 'open-air prison,' subject to daily bombardment by Israeli rockets and heavy artillery. Israel has announced plans to cut electricity and fuel supplies to the Strip. These supplies are absolutely necessary to maintaining basic services such as hospitals and sewage treatment plants. We now regularly hear stories of Gaza residents being killed in floods of sewage, as Israel prevents needed supplies and inspections of sewage lakes in the area.

The point here, however, is not to focus on the current situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The enormous value of the book lies in the political perspective it outlines. We need to build upon these perspectives and present an assessment of the current stage of our solidarity efforts in places such as Canada and the USA. It is very important that we always situate our efforts historically, take a step back to look at where we are at and where we want to be going.

### **Return to Oslo?**

Much of the mainstream media has attempted to present the current situation as a re-run of the early 1990s. We are told that the U.S. and EU are rolling up their sleeves to bring the Palestinian and Israeli sides to the negotiating table in late November. Both Mahmoud Abbas and Ehud Olmert are said to be trying to move this process forward but are faced with the recalcitrance of "extremists on both sides". Both sides will have to make "painful sacrifices". But – if done right – we can return to the good old days of the Oslo peace process and eventually see the establishment of a Palestinian state living "alongside a secure Israel."

Naturally, as with the mainstream media coverage of just about everything, this picture is designed to confuse and obfuscate the real situation on the ground. All the talk of negotiations, peace, and painful compromises is designed first and foremost to solidify apartheid in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It's very important that we understand this message. When the Oslo agreement was signed in 1993 it created enormous confusion within the Palestinian national movement and the solidarity organizations outside. This was an agreement that was sold to the world as a plan for a Palestinian state, yet in reality it aimed at creating the very situation we see

today on the ground. Palestinians herded into isolated Bantustans surrounded by settlements, walls, checkpoints with their movement controlled by permits.

The talk of peace and negotiations is designed to hide the reality of an apartheid agreement. Israel is trying to find someone who will sign away the rights of the people – most fundamentally the right of return of Palestinian refugees. This is what is going on now. It is not a “civil war” between Hamas and Fatah, or media fantasies about the supposed emerging Islamic state in Gaza.

The 1993 Oslo Accords killed the solidarity movement for seven years. Many people here today were involved in these earlier solidarity movements across North America and can attest to the collapse that happened in the early 1990s. This situation didn't reverse until the people once again rose in the second Intifada in September 2000. That uprising re-sparked the solidarity movement.

But the situation today differs significantly from the early 1990s. In many respects we are in a much stronger situation today than that earlier period. This is obviously a testament to the resilience and struggle of the Palestinian people. But it is also due to the work of those in the solidarity movement who did keep fighting throughout the Oslo years, and understood from the outset the real nature of the Oslo agreement.

We need to keep this message clear in the coming period. U.S.-sponsored ‘peace’ plans, backed by some of the client Arab states in the region, will not achieve liberation. The Palestinian people will completely reject any self-appointed leader that attempts to relinquish their rights, the bedrock of which is the right of return of Palestinian refugees. This is not a fringe or ‘radical’ position but is the fundamental outlook of the Palestinian people as a whole. A very important confirmation of this fact occurred in Canada in late October, over 54 delegates representing virtually every Palestinian community organization across Canada unanimously adopted an open-letter to Mahmoud Abbas warning him of the “disaster” of the Oslo Accords and the complete rejection of the upcoming U.S.-supported summit in Annapolis, Maryland.

### **Not Just the West Bank and Gaza Strip**

One thing that gives us strength today is the widespread understanding that the struggle for justice is not solely a question of what happens in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The aim of the Oslo project was to reduce our struggle to negotiating over bits of land in these areas. Today we see the reality of this – those bits of land are nothing but open-air prisons where we see Palestinian prison guards but Israel continues to hold the keys to the cell.

But today we see that the Palestinian people reject that division. Most importantly, we see the growing movement of Palestinian citizens of Israel who are demanding equal rights in a state that has been built on racism and settler-colonialism. Over the past year, four separate declarations by Palestinians from inside Israel have expressed this demand. In response to these declarations, the head of the Israeli intelligence, Yuval Diskin, called Palestinian citizens of Israel a “strategic threat” and issued a veiled warning that any one attempting to organize around the demand of simple democracy would face the repressive arm of the state.

Israel cannot countenance the simple demand for equal rights for Palestinian citizens because it is a state built on racism. Leaders of the Palestinian community have been arrested and kept under administrative detention orders without charge or trial. The head of the National Democratic Assembly (NDA) party and elected member of the Israeli parliament (the Knesset), Azmi Bishara, was forced to flee Israel because he was threatened with imminent arrest. On 30 October, in scenes reminiscent of the West Bank, Israeli police attacked a village in the Galilee village with live ammunition, injuring 40 residents, three of them seriously. And the calls from prominent Israeli academics that describe the Palestinian population inside Israel as a “demographic threat” are getting ever louder.

A barrage of new laws attempt to solidify Israeli racism and silence the growing movement of Palestinians inside Israel. One of these is a law that will prevent anyone who travels to what is deemed an “enemy state” from running for the Israeli parliament. This law is explicitly aimed at Palestinian parties such as the NDA that maintain strong ties with Arab countries. Moreover, in one of the most Orwellian measures ever adopted by the Israeli state, an October 2007 law requires all school children to sign Israel’s “Declaration of Independence”: a declaration that explicitly upholds Israel’s character as a “Jewish state”. Imagine any other country that required every child to sign a document supporting the privileged rights of one ethnic or religious group? As Azmi Bishara has pointed out, Palestinians attending Israeli schools are required to sign a document that negates their very existence!

The emerging movement of Palestinians inside Israel is a very important development and cause for optimism. These Palestinians are an integral part of the Palestinian people as a whole. Their struggle strikes the very nature of Israel as an exclusionary, racist state and shows that Israeli apartheid is not just a question of what happens in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. We must continually strengthen our solidarity with their efforts and struggle.

### **No to Normalization**

Today the strength of our movement rests upon the widespread acceptance that there can be no normalization with Zionism and Israeli apartheid. The basic principle of our movement is that the way to winning justice is not through ‘dialogue’ or ‘joint projects’ or empty calls for ‘peace.’ Rather, justice will be won by isolating the Israeli state and all those who support it.

This is a big shift from fifteen years ago when many people bought into the Oslo myth and normalization with Israel was all the rage. A lot of money was thrown at these projects, hundreds of NGOs sprung up dedicated to dialogue and the ‘peace process.’ But today there is virtual unanimity among the solidarity movement. The way forward is through a sustained campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israeli apartheid. This runs against any attempt to normalize relations with the oppressor.

The call for boycott, divestment and sanctions that came from Palestine in 2005 is very clear. The Israeli state must be isolated in the manner of South African apartheid until three conditions are satisfied: the Israeli occupation of all Arab lands is ended; there is full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel; and the refugees are allowed to return home. These three demands encapsulate the Palestinian experience since 1948: a people who have been uprooted from their

land and prevented from returning home. Our struggle is not just in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but also to end the racist nature of the Israeli state and allow the refugees to return.

It is important to stress that the BDS call is not something that suddenly appeared in 2005. For decades, the core of the Palestinian struggle has always held a position of 'anti-normalization.' To work with and normalize relations with the Israeli state and its supporters means to give consent to one's own oppression. Rather, we should act to isolate and reveal the structures that hold power in place. The need is not for 'dialogue' because the problem is not a lack of understanding. To claim otherwise serves only to justify the existing power structures. More simply: there is an oppressor and an oppressed, and peace will only come through winning justice.

The struggle is not between Jewish people and Palestinians. Anti-Zionist Jews and Israelis are prominent activists and leaders of the solidarity movement, including inside Israel. The solidarity movement is totally clear on this point and to claim otherwise is only to engage in slander. Indeed, *Between the Lines* was co-written by an anti-Zionist Jewish Israeli who has spent many decades working alongside Palestinians in support of justice. The central question is one of racism and settler-colonialism not religious conflict. The BDS call is aimed at Israeli state institutions and their supporters. Our goal is a state where anyone can live regardless of their religious beliefs or ethnicity.

### **Canadian Support for Israel**

In Canada, we have an important role to play in this global campaign to isolate the Israeli state. The Canadian government is one of the strongest international supporters of Israeli apartheid in the world. Canada was the first country in the world to cut aid to the Palestinian Authority following the elections of January 2006. Canada did this even before the Israeli government.

The Canadian government at all levels has provided full diplomatic support for Israel's war crimes. Many of us remember that during Israel's bombardment of Lebanon in 2006, Harper described Israel's actions as "measured and justified" and opposed calls for a ceasefire. But Harper's comments are not those of an individual. Across the political spectrum, Canada's mainstream political parties have given unequivocal support to Israeli policies. In 2005, it was then Liberal Party leader Paul Martin who declared that "Israel's values are Canada's values."

At the economic level, Canada has signed numerous agreements with Israel that serve to strengthen and sustain the Israeli economy. In 1997, the Canadian government signed the Canada Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA). This is the only FTA Canada has signed outside of the western hemisphere. It has been an enormous boon to Israel. From 2000 to 2005, the value of Israeli exports to Canada exceeded Canadian exports to Israel, reversing the trend from the 1990s. Over the same period, average annual Israeli foreign direct investment in Canada exceeded that of Canada in Israel. This is an agreement that has benefited Israel, and helped support the Israeli economy.

Another agreement, the Canada Israel Industrial Research and Development Foundation, provides seed money for Israeli-Canadian research and development. Over 200 companies have been funded by this scheme and the Canadian government now boasts that Israel is its longest

standing technology partner. A similar agreement between Ontario and the Israeli government was also signed by Dalton McGuinty and Ehud Olmert in 2005.

Prominent Canadian business leaders have been among the staunchest supporters of the Israeli government. Heather Reisman and Gerry Schwartz are the majority owners of Indigo Books. They set up a fund called the Heseg Foundation for Lone Soldiers that provides scholarships and other support for individuals who have chosen to go to Israel and serve in the Israeli military. In 2006, Reisman and Schwartz attended a ceremony at an Israeli military base where they were awarded the gun of an Israeli soldier killed in Lebanon.

These various forms of support are not surprising given the record of the Canadian government in places such as Afghanistan and Haiti where Canadian troops and other personnel serve to support military occupations. Or the record of large Canadian companies in extracting the resources and wealth of people around the globe. Or the centuries-long attacks against the indigenous people of this land that continues today. This is why the Palestinian solidarity movement also stands with those struggles: we are all strengthened when we fight together.

### **Ideological Battle**

But we should be clear: the campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions is not about politely asking the Canadian government or business leaders to cut their ties with Israeli apartheid. We must compel them to do so. We know from the South African struggle that those in power will support apartheid until we build a movement large enough to force a change.

Over ten years after the formal end of South African apartheid a certain myth has grown up that says the world was always against the practices of the South African regime. Nothing could be further from the truth. Successive Canadian, U.S. and British governments wholeheartedly backed South African apartheid for decades. The leaderships of Canadian unions proudly championed their links with the apartheid regime and large corporations made millions from their investments in South African apartheid. It took decades of hard work by activists to turn around popular acceptance and support for South African apartheid.

It is important to emphasize that the BDS strategy is fundamentally about winning this ideological battle. No one holds any illusions that Israel will suffer economically at this stage from resolutions and boycott campaigns. Rather, BDS provides a powerful entry point for talking to people about the nature of the Israeli state and the structures that support it in the West. What we are doing is convincing people that Israel – like the South African precedent – is a pariah state that must be isolated. To deal with Israel is something to be ashamed of. We are undermining the ideological support (much of it passive) that allows Israel to continue its horrendous practices against the Palestinian people. For this reason, the BDS strategy cannot be separated from the day-to-day information work we do around Palestine. This information and educational work lays the basis for BDS work. The BDS strategy provides a direction for activity once people understand the reality of the situation.

We have made some very important gains here in Canada. The historic resolution of CUPE Ontario in May 2006 in support of boycott and divestment was a turning point. The CUPE Ontario resolution was an outstanding example of how BDS enables us to educate and activate



people around Palestine. For the first time in decades, the key issues of the Palestinian struggle were debated on the front pages of Canadian newspapers and on TV and radio stations across the country. Thousands of ordinary CUPE members received information about the campaign or went through workshops and talks explaining why Israeli apartheid should be isolated and ended. The greatest achievement of this resolution was the chance to speak to rank and file CUPE members and build support for Palestine within the union. We can't underestimate how important this was in helping shift popular consciousness and understanding. This quite simply would not have happened if CUPE had simply passed yet another 'condemn the violence,' 'call for peace' resolution. Hundreds of thousands of people – that is no exaggeration – were touched by this resolution.

On campuses too, there has been a strong upsurge in understanding the nature of Israeli apartheid. The annual Israeli apartheid week, which began here in Toronto, has expanded globally to cities such as New York, Oxford and Cambridge. In 2007, close to a thousand people attended the week's activities in Toronto. This coming year promises to be even larger and occur in many more cities across the world.

The campaign to boycott Chapters-Indigo has also been a great success. Regular pickets are happening in six cities across the country. Over 40,000 leaflets have been distributed nationally since the campaign began in January. Heather Reisman's book reading appearances across the country have been disrupted by activists opposed to her support of Israeli apartheid. Students at a high school in Toronto lobbied their school to pass a resolution to boycott Indigo. Smaller bookstores in Ontario have signed onto the campaign and now carry leaflets and information about Israeli apartheid.

Our next step should be to raise our voices demanding that Canadian governments at both the federal and provincial levels cut their ties with Israeli apartheid. We can call for agreements such as CIFTA, or, here in Ontario, the provincial level agreements with Israel, to be abrogated. We must call for an end to the diplomatic cover provided to Israeli war crimes. The Venezuelan government of Hugo Chavez has shown the way in this regard when they became the first country in the world to withdraw their ambassador from Israel in the summer of 2006.

### **Conclusion**

Israel's crushing of the population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and its apparent success in cultivating a Palestinian leadership to return to an Oslo-type process are pyrrhic victories. The real nature of Israel is truly understood by more people than any other point in the last sixty years and support for the Zionist project beyond Western governments and elites is in tatters. Palestinians remain one people: united across refugee camps, the Diaspora, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and inside Israel itself. All these sectors of the people are moving forward and rejecting normalization with Israel, despite what various self-appointed leaderships might do or say.

This is a time to be very proud of our activities in support of the Palestinian struggle. In years to come, we shall look back on the struggles of today and realize that what we did in the here and now was an integral part of winning justice. This is a struggle that affects the entire people of the

Middle East and its outcome will shape the course of history. It is not a struggle that will end tomorrow, but we can be absolutely confident that it is a struggle which we shall eventually win.

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