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Socialist Voice #413, March 1, 2010

Cuba: Strides Towards Sustainability

by Helen Yaffe

Cuba marked the 50th anniversary of its revolution in 2009. The Cuban people have withstood five decades of hostility from the United States and its international allies. However, Cuba's best form of resistance has been not just the assertion of national sovereignty, but the creation of an alternative model of development which places ecology and humanity at its core.

Applying the yardsticks of conventional economics to assess Cuban society, for example focusing on disposable income, GDP or levels of consumption, commentators often conclude that the revolution has failed to pull the Cuban people out of poverty, but such criticism omits the fact that the Cuban state guarantees every citizen a basic food supply ("ration"); most incomes are not taxed; most people own their own homes or pay very little rent; utility bills, transport and medicine costs are symbolic; the opera, cinema, ballet are cheap for all. High-quality education and healthcare are free.

These provisions are part of the material wealth of Cuba and cannot be dismissed – as if individual consumption of DVDs and digital cameras were the only measure of economic growth.

The challenge is to disentangle our understanding of development from the notion of economic growth. Against great odds, Cuba has transformed itself from an underdeveloped "neo-colony" into an independent state, boasting world-leading human development indicators, internationalist education, healthcare programmes and sustainable development.

It is no mere coincidence that Cuba is the only country in the world, according to the WWF's 2006 Living Planet report, to have achieved sustainable development: improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of its ecosystem.

Domestic solutions

The collapse of the socialist bloc between 1989 and 1991 led to a collapse in Cuba's foreign trade. GDP plummeted 35% by 1993 and there were critical scarcities of hydrocarbon energy resources, fertilisers, food imports, medicines, cement, equipment and resources in every sector. Cuba was compelled to search for domestic solutions.

In agriculture, organic fertilisers and pesticides, crop-rotation techniques and organic urban gardens called organoponicos were developed, while tractors were replaced with human and animal labour. Bikes were imported from China and car-pooling was established. As the economy improved, Cuba extended these measures, introducing ecotourism and solar energy.

While economic reforms were introduced, including concessions to the 'free market', free universal welfare provision, state planning and the predominance of state property were maintained. Incredibly, given the severity of the crisis, between 1990 and 2003, the number of Cuban doctors increased by 76%, dentists by 46% and nurses by 16%. The number of maternity homes rose by 86%, day-care centres for older people by 107% and homes for people with disabilities by 47%. Infant mortality fell and life expectancy rose.

Internationalist links also increased, as thousands of Cuban specialists, including healthcare professionals and educators, volunteered to work in poor communities around the world. By November 2008, Cuba had nearly 30,000 doctors and other health professionals working in 75 countries, providing healthcare and training locals. Its literacy programme has taught over 3,600,000 people from 23 countries to read and write.

2006 dawned as the Year of the Energy Revolution in Cuba, a major state initiative to save and rationalise the use of energy resources: install efficient new power generators, experiment with renewable energy and replace old durable goods (refrigerators, televisions and cookers) with new energy-saving equipment. Ten million energy-saving light bulbs and over six million electric rice cookers and pressure cookers were distributed free of charge. The aim was to raise the island's capacity for electricity generation and save the government millions of pesos formerly spent on subsidised fuel. State subsidies mean that energy consumption is not rationed through the market, so energy efficiency, not price hikes, is the principal means of reducing consumption.

Building on the campaign for energy efficiency, in 2008 Cuba launched a campaign to increase food production. Following the closure of many sugar mills, in 2007 up to 50% of Cuba's arable land lay fallow, while over 80% of the food ration was imported. The international rise in food and fuel prices saw the cost of Cuba's imports increase by \$1 billion from 2007 to 2008. Now, idle land is being distributed in usufruct (rent-free loan) to those who want to produce organic food.

Already organoponicos in Havana supply 100% of the city's consumption needs in fruit and vegetables. They are supplemented by urban patios, of which there are over 60,000 in Havana alone. According to Sinan Koont of the Department of Latin American Studies at Dickinson College, Pennsylvania, "It is not just about economics producing food and creating employment. It is also about community development and preserving and improving the environment, bringing a healthier way of life to the cities."

Central to understanding these achievements is the role of the state in Cuba. State ownership and central planning allow a rational allocation of resources, balancing environmental concerns and human welfare alongside economic objectives. Critics who point to the absence of multi-party elections and 'civil society' in Cuba fail to appreciate how the island's alternative grassroots system of participative democracy ensures that the state is representative of its population and acts in their collective interests.

Under capitalism, private businesses regard the Earth's natural resources as a "free gift" to capital. Western-style parliamentarianism dissuades short-term elected governments from calculating the human or ecological cost of their policies on the future, while economic growth wins corporate backing and public votes. The need for sustainable development creates an irreconcilable contradiction under capitalism because it implies obstruction of the profit motive which drives production.

The ALBA model

In December 2004, Cuba and Venezuela formalised their alliance with the formation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). Between 2006 and 2009, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Honduras (under Zelaya), Ecuador, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda joined ALBA, turning it into a political and trading bloc of significance. Members are engaged in projects of humanitarian, economic and social cooperation through non-market, non-profit-based exchanges.

The Bank of ALBA was inaugurated in December 2008 with \$2 billion capital, operating without loan conditions and functioning on the basis of members' consensus. It contributes to freeing countries from the dictates of the World Bank and the IMF. In January 2010, a new "virtual" currency for exchanges within ALBA will be introduced, undermining the leverage of the US dollar.

ALBA is the fruit of Cuba's internationalist welfare-based development model. It is also the expression of pan-Latin American integrationist movements and the ascendancy of social movements representing the interests of the indigenous and poor communities. These sectors demand rational development strategies which respect their traditions and environment. The April 2009 ALBA declaration, "Capitalism Threatens Life on the Planet," reflects this:

"The global economic crisis, climate change, the food crisis and the energy crisis are the result of the decay of capitalism, which threatens to end life and the planet. To avert this outcome, it is necessary to develop and model an alternative to the capitalist system. A

system based on solidarity not competition; a system in harmony with Mother Earth and not plundering of human resources.”

The 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution should be celebrated, not as a historical event, but as a living example, with increasing relevance, that it is possible to live with dignity, and sustainably, outside of the capitalist profit motive, with human welfare and the environment at the centre of development. It is a lesson we must learn urgently because, in the words of Fidel Castro at his speech at the Earth Summit in 1992, “Tomorrow will be too late...”

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Socialist Voice #414, March 9, 2010

Israel Is an Apartheid State and That Is Why It Is Losing Legitimacy

By Judy Rebick

Before Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) even began, members of the Ontario Legislature and the Canadian Parliament are falling all over each other to denounce it. I can't remember another time when elected legislators formally denounced a student activity like this. Perhaps during the 1950's when McCarthyism was rampant but that was before my time.

Last week the Ontario Legislature unanimously passed a resolution denouncing Israel Apartheid Week submitted by PC Peter Shure who said calling Israel an apartheid state was "close to hate speech." While there were only 30 MPP's in the Legislature at the time, NDP MPP Cheri di Novo was one of them and spoke in favour of the resolution. This week a Conservative MP is introducing a resolution calling IAW anti-Semitic.

Before I deal with why these unprecedented attacks are taking place, I'd like to share with you a great talk I heard last night at Ryerson from Na'eem Jeena, a leading activist and academic from South Africa who works for Palestinian solidarity. He told us that South African apartheid had three pillars of apartheid and Israel shares all three.

1. Different rights for different races. In the case of Israel, it is different rights for Jews and for non-Jews. For example the law of return of 1950 says Jews can return to Israel and be given citizenship even if they have no links to the country other than mythical biblical ones; whereas Palestinians cannot return even if their parents or grandparents lived there.

2. Separation of so-called racial groups into different geographical areas. Even within the borders of Israel, 93 percent of land is reserved as a national land trust or Jewish National Fund land is for the exclusive use of Jews. The 20 percent of the population that is Palestinians living in Israel have to share access to the 7 percent of private land that is left. The Israeli Supreme Court has made a number of decisions that Palestinians cannot live on Jewish lands. There are not only residential areas that are banned to Palestinians but there are separate roads for Jews and Palestinians. That was never true in South Africa even in times of crisis. Moreover Palestinians have less access to water than Jews living nearby

Finally the movement of Palestinians is severely restricted much more so than were blacks in South Africa. The famous pass laws in South Africa meant that Blacks had to show government issued passes to move around but Palestinians are even more restricted by walls and checkpoints and if they live in the Gaza Strip can't leave at all.

3. Security and Repression Matrix of Laws and Security. There was serious repression in the Black townships but there were never tanks or planes buzzing overhead like there is in West Bank. Israeli military violence against Palestinian communities, says Jena, is far worse than anything suffered by Blacks in South Africa during apartheid.

If Israel is becoming a pariah in the world it is not because of anti-Semitism, it is because they are practicing a form of apartheid even more egregious than that practiced in South Africa. Others have compiled comments from some of the most respected leaders of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa who see what Israel is doing as apartheid. There is a reason why the BDS is strongest in South Africa. People there recognize apartheid when they see it.

Finally the UN Convention on Apartheid condemns the crime of apartheid that refers to a series of inhuman acts—including murder, torture, arbitrary arrest, illegal imprisonment, exploitation, marginalization, and persecution—committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining the domination of one racial group by another. If the shoe fits.

So why are politicians including some from the NDP setting a student activity like IAW in their sites? An all party coalition of parliamentarians has been holding hearings on what they call the “new anti-Semitism,” by which they mean criticism of Israel. They heard from every University President who appeared before them that there is no rise of anti-Semitism on their campuses and yet the false rumours of such a rise persist because of the equation of criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism.”

Israel is beginning to see that the non-violent anti-apartheid and BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement is a greater threat to their power than the any military threat. In Israel and Palestine, they are moving to arrest non-violent activists who are leading the movement there. And they are using all their economic and political power to push friendly governments to move against these protests.

But there is a problem. It’s called democracy and freedom of speech. However much you might disagree that Israel practices apartheid, you cannot shut down a discussion of the issue or a demonstration or disinvestment campaign against Israel because freedom of speech is a fundamental democratic right in most Western countries. In Canada, the only way to shut down the movement is to vilify it as hateful or anti-semitic. That is what our parliamentarians are now trying to do.

I am Jewish and have been working one and off for Palestinian rights for many years, as have many other Jews who feel a special responsibility to speak out against injustices committed by Israel. During that time, I have rarely experienced any anti-Semitism. In the IAW organizing, I have experienced none. If Israel is losing legitimacy in the world, it is because of what their government is doing to the Palestinians, not because of anti-Semitism.

This attempt to shut down criticism of Israel is the most frightening assault on freedom of speech I have ever seen in this country. Whether or not you think Israel Apartheid Week is the best name for this week of discussion supporting Palestinian rights, please write your MP and your MPP and tell them you think it is wrong for Parliamentarians to denounce this kind of educational activity.

From rabble.ca on March 1, the first day of Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) 2010. Judy Rebick’s blog is Transforming Power.

Socialist Voice #413, March 9, 2010

Activists Debate Vancouver Olympic Protests

by **Derrick O’Keefe**

After years of organizing work, the protest movement around the Vancouver Winter Olympics can proudly claim a number of important victories. A vibrant demonstration of thousands met the corporate spectacle head on, marching to within metres of the Opening Ceremonies at B.C. Place February 12.

The ‘Welcoming Committee’ that organized this mass protest was representative of the range of groups challenging the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Vancouver Games conveners (VANOC).

The achievements of this movement include: Pushing back hard against attempts to restrict free assembly and speech, exposing the “greenwashing” of the Games, and raising awareness of homelessness and indigenous rights issues. The IOC brand was successfully dented and the longer-term impact of the Games illuminated. Over the course of the Games, a host of creative direct actions and protests pushed demands for social justice.

However, there were also missed opportunities, and some acrimonious debate in the activist community.

The ‘dualism’ of an event like the Olympics was perhaps not seriously enough considered. It’s a two-week sporting event and mass spectacle, replete with tons of free activities for the general public – it’s not the same as a meeting of the world’s bankers and politicians. In fact, many if not the vast majority of those critical of the Games and their impact, and critical of the anti-democratic depredations of the IOC – people who would have preferred public resources had gone to housing, health care, education, and other urgent needs – still enjoy watching the world’s greatest hockey players, or going out to see a free show, or just walking about and seeing and meeting folks from around the world.

I think this dualism was missed or underestimated by some of us in the protest movements, and as a result opportunities for creative outreach around a range of social justice issues have been given less energy than they might have.

The main focus of controversy has been a protest action billed as a Heart Attack (‘to clog the arteries of capitalism’), which marched through Vancouver’s downtown core on Saturday, February 13. In a crowd of 200 or 300, a number of people engaged in property destruction. The windows of TD Bank and the Hudson’s Bay Company were smashed, newspaper boxes were overturned, private vehicles vandalized – confrontations with the police and angry members of the general public ensued. Such incidents are frequently the work of unwanted intruders. But in this case, many supporters of the action affirmed that the destruction was planned by participants in a ‘Black Bloc’ contingent.

The Olympic Resistance Network and some other activists declared this action a success, while many others of us questioned its effectiveness. We were initially told, by some, that to raise concerns about the action was to “break solidarity.” This is a major tenet of the notion of “respect for diversity of tactics,” wherein no tactics are ruled out ahead of time and criticism remains internal. In practice, this can mean suppression of open debate in the activist community, especially since, in this case, the groups that had signed on to “diversity of tactics” represented only a part of those groups organizing around the Games.

Defending the action in [rabble.ca](#), Alex Hundert claims that all participants in the ‘Heart Attack’ knew what was going to happen, despite the fact that uncertainty is a central tenet of diversity of tactics action:

“Anyone who says that they didn’t know what was going to happen is lying. There were 200 people in black with masks on, and ‘Riot 2010’ has been a rallying call for the movement for more than two years now. Everyone knew what was going to happen, and they all marched anyway.”

This statement is false. Many of those who went along on the ‘Heart Attack’ did not know what was going to take place – and the actions did not even communicate clearly with some of them. One activist, a woman of colour who grew up under a military dictatorship, explained:

“Some of those who engaged in property destruction appeared not to have solidarity with other protesters, displaying a hostile attitude towards some other participants and even independent media members, as well as the general public. This looked like kids playing at street fighting and mocks the struggles of Third World people who have at times had to use violent tactics to liberate themselves.”

Eric Doherty, a long-time environmental activist in Vancouver, put it this way:

“I was at the Heart Attack, and I expected strategic and targeted property destruction. I worried that there might be ‘trashing’ at random; unfortunately that is a lot of what happened. Some of it just looked dumb, like the plastic garbage bin dumped out on the quiet side road – littering does not block traffic.... This is not a condemnation of the black bloc tactic. It is a critique of what was done by people in black on one particular day.”

And on this basis, a critique of particular actions can still be done in the framework of movement building and solidarity. The same vigorous critique needs to be applied to all tactics and to all sectors of the progressive movements, from electoral politics, to NGOs and the labour movement.

No matter the radical and no doubt commendable motivations of many of those who used the Black Bloc tactic, and of those who engaged in property destruction at the Vancouver action, the result was a setback for the broad movement.

In the rabble article, Hundert asserts, “The Black Block is a wrecking ball tactic that makes space for more mainstream or creative tactics.” But part of making space involves the receptiveness of the public to your overall message. The action failed to communicate clearly with that public, whose reaction was overwhelmingly one of disgust, confusion or even fear. This was evident from hundreds of letters to the editor, and hundreds and thousands of conversations with ordinary people, even those predisposed to be critical of the Games.

The action didn’t create political space; it shut it down. And it served up a PR coup for the Vancouver Police and the Olympic organizers. No doubt this was in part whipped up by the corporate media, but that was an entirely predictable outcome. As author and Olympics critic Chris Shaw put it, it was VANOC’s “wet dream,” because it helped justify the \$1 billion dollar security budget. Especially given that the authorities in Vancouver had refused to rule out the use of agent provocateurs, we must question the use of a “tactic” that inherently makes easier agent provocateur infiltration.

There are times and places where property destruction, sabotage and even armed resistance are necessary and effective. But the use of any tactic has to flow from a coherent strategy, and should be part of an effort to mobilize as broad a movement as possible. Effective use of civil disobedience is all about communicating with the people you are trying to win over. If the tactic you employ is not understandable to them, it’s counter-productive.

“Respect for diversity of tactics”, it must be frankly put, has become something of a shibboleth in parts of the Left today. A healthy Left shouldn’t let any shibboleth go unquestioned. In Vancouver, it was invoked to tell some of us to shut up. We didn’t. On this basis, I hope that we can count the debate around diversity of tactics as one positive outcome of the events in Vancouver.

With the G8/G20 looming and authorities promising to impose a “fortress Toronto,” we all need to be able to debate fully and frankly, and not be afraid to, if necessary, democratically decide to exclude certain tactics.

A version of this article will be published in Socialist Worker

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A View From Toronto – A Hub of ‘Israel Delegitimization’

by **Rafeef Ziadah**

As a Palestinian refugee, the city of Toronto has always been a place of exile to me. I usually think of it as a large (rather cold) waiting room on my way back to Haifa where my grandparents were born. However, following the publication of a recent report by the prominent Israeli think-tank, the Reut Institute[1], I felt some pride for my adopted city.

The Reut Institute declared Toronto a “hub of Israel delegitimization” and that the growing campaign calling for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel had become a “strategic threat.” The report confirmed to those of us involved in the BDS movement that our work was not in vain. The tireless work of many people around the world to build an effective movement to challenge Israeli apartheid was beginning to pay off. The aim of this article is to look at the key arguments of the Reut Institute’s report and to use them to interpret the response to the recently-concluded Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW), held in Toronto (and also started there) and numerous cities across Canada and the world.

Delegitimization Network

The premise of the Reut Institute Report is that there is a Resistance Network (made up of groups like Hizbullah and Hamas) and a Delegitimization Network. Toronto falls into the latter as a key hub of BDS activities around the world. According to the report, the delegitimization network aims to “eliminate the Zionist model by turning Israel into a pariah state through challenging the moral legitimacy of its authorities and very existence (as opposed to its policies); tying its military hands through the use of non-military tools such as international law; and undermining its economy through boycotts, divestments, and sanctions.”

It is true that the BDS movement has been based on clear principles of human rights and international law and attempts to use these as a means of “tying [Israel’s] military hands.” These principles are summarized in the three demands found in the Palestinian BDS Call, signed by over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations in July 2005:

- ending the occupation and dismantling the Apartheid wall;
- equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel; and
- the right of return for Palestinian refugees.[2]

In the academic and cultural fields, the BDS movement derives its perspective from the Palestinian Call for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel issued a year earlier in July 2004.[3] These two calls represent the most authoritative and widely supported strategic statements to have emerged from Palestine in decades, signed onto by all political factions, labour, student and women organizations, and refugee groups. What the Reut Institute calls a “delegitimization network” is a Palestinian-led movement initiated by those living under Israeli

apartheid and exiled from their land. It is this call for solidarity that cities around the world are taking up.

It is also true that the BDS movement aims to build awareness of Israel as a rogue state. Israel was established in 1948 by forcibly displacing the overwhelming majority of Palestine's indigenous Arab population from their homeland. Today, Palestinian refugees are prevented from returning to our homes and lands from which they were expelled. In contrast, any person who claims Jewish descent from anywhere in the world may become an Israeli citizen under the so-called Law of Return. Israel defines itself as a Jewish state, not a state of all its citizens. This is apartheid, and is sustained through an elaborate system of laws, policies, and practices that discriminate openly against Palestinian citizens of the state (of course within the apartheid logic their identity is denied and they are called Arab-Israelis, not Palestinian). All of these points are well-documented and understood by Palestinians, international human rights experts, and those with an intimate experience of South African apartheid.[4]

Today, the West Bank is surrounded by an apartheid wall and Palestinians are being rounded into ever smaller ghettos. Literally the earth is shrinking and closing down on us wherever we are – simply for the crime of being stateless Palestinians. In Lebanon, Palestinian refugees are still barred from seventy-one professions. On the borders of Iraq, there are Palestinian refugees stranded in the desert with no country willing to accept them. The fundamental cause of these abuses is an inability to return to our homes. One does not cease to be Palestinian when outside the borders of the occupied territories. After trying every possible path to achieve our basic human rights (from armed struggle to negotiations), it is clearer today more than ever that what is needed is a movement to isolate Israeli Apartheid in the manner of South African apartheid. Since the so called 'international community' seems to be oblivious to the conditions that Palestinians are living in (conditions that the most imaginative of science fiction writers could not predict), the only option left is to make a pariah state of Israel for its crimes until it feels the necessity to comply with international law. Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions are a legitimate tool in this strategy – they help to educate about Israeli crimes against Palestinians and, more importantly, they move people beyond basic condemnation to effective action.

Grassroots Versus Top-down

The Reut report is also correct when it claims that:

“While Israel works ‘from the center to the periphery’ or ‘top-down,’ [the delegitimization networks] work ‘from the periphery to the center’ and ‘bottom-up.’ While Israel emphasizes formal state-to-state relations with political and business elites, delegitimizers focus on non-governmental organizations, academia, grassroots movements, and the general public.”

Yes, the BDS movement does work on the grassroots level. That is what movements for social justice have historically done and certainly how the movement against South African apartheid was organized. The fight against apartheid in South Africa was not initiated by politicians – as a

matter of fact, most officials supported apartheid until it became untenable for them to do so. It was the average person who pushed for BDS in their unions, schools, places of work, and places of worship that created this mass pressure.

On the other hand, Israel does naturally find allies at the state-to-state level (as the Reut Institute acknowledges). This is a partial explanation of why Israeli Apartheid Week in Canada was denounced by official government bodies. Just last week, when the Conservative Member of the Ontario Legislature, Peter Shurman, put forward a motion condemning the week in the provincial parliament, the motion was passed. MPP Shurman stated that the term apartheid is “poisonous” and “odious.” For the second year running, Liberal party leader Michael Ignatieff spoke out against the week saying “Israeli Apartheid Week is part of a global campaign of calls for divestment, boycotts and proclamations, and it should be condemned unequivocally and absolutely.” In the House of Commons, a motion was put forward that stated:

“This House considers itself to be a friend of the State of Israel ... [and] is concerned about expressions of anti-Semitism under the guise of “Israeli Apartheid Week” ... [and] explicitly condemns any action in Canada as well as internationally that would equate the State of Israel with the rejected and racist policy of apartheid.”

Using the term anti-Semitism in this context is nothing but a smear tactic with no factual evidence to support it. From its inception, the BDS movement and Israeli Apartheid Week activities have been explicitly rooted in universal values and principles. The BDS Call categorically rejects all forms of racism, racial discrimination and colonial oppression. What these elite-level condemnations show, however, is that Israeli apartheid does indeed have strong “formal state-to-state relations with the political and business elite” in Canada. The interests of these elites coincide in their support of colonial oppression in the Middle East. Otherwise, it is puzzling why, in the midst of a severe economic crisis, Canadian parliaments choose to debate an educational week on university campuses. Why is it essential for politicians across the spectrum to denounce the use of the term apartheid? Since when is it the business of politicians to censor what terms citizens can and cannot use to describe another state?

There is nothing ‘poisonous’ about using a legal term and debating factual matters regarding a state with a long record of human rights violations. There have been many excellent articles written about the use of the term apartheid (both for legal and comparative reasons), and endless quotes have been circulated by prominent academics and many South African activists making the comparison.[5] The issue here is why such unwarranted hysteria over a week of educational events organized on a university campus by students? Canadian politicians seem to have gained a strong interest in student activism because of IAW, but are not nearly as interested in passing motions when it comes to addressing the state of the educational system or the prohibitive fees that students are expected to pay.

According to a B’nai Brith press release issued on the 25th of February 2010, congratulating the Ontario Legislature for passing the pro-Israel motion, they hope “today’s resolution is an important first step toward what must be an outright ban of ‘Israel Apartheid Week’.” This is the

dilemma faced by the supporters of Israeli apartheid – to be a friend of Israel means to support the Canadian state in censoring its own people. The apartheid logic does not only exist within the borders of Israel (yet undefined), but spills into the international arena to states that see themselves as natural allies of Israel. The fact that the Ontario Legislative Assembly would deem it important to defend Israel's human rights record speaks volumes about the nature of Canadian politics. In this manner, the grassroots work of the BDS movement inevitably grows to encompass questions of free speech and the need to defend democratic spaces in Canada from the repressive intervention of legislative bodies.

Whether these resolutions are, indeed, preparations for a full banning of IAW remains to be seen. However, the severity of the attack is an admission that IAW is effective in reaching a wide audience and in exposing apartheid Israel. Israeli Apartheid Week is growing exponentially each year. This year it hit a record number of 60 cities around the world. The arguments about Israel being an apartheid state are being heard. The condemnations from these official state bodies in Canada only puts them at odds with the move toward the recognition in international law by human rights agencies in the Middle East of the abuses of Palestinians by the Israeli state as, in fact, posed by the BDS movement.

Dealing with the “Hubs”

In their document, the Reut Institute specifically describes what they call ‘hubs of delegitimization’ and ‘catalysts’ within these hubs:

“Hubs are units of the network that have extraordinary influence on the values, priorities, and patterns of conduct of the network due to a very high number of links to other units; Catalysts are units of the network that dedicate themselves to its cause by mobilizing financial and human resources, collecting information and turning it into knowledge, developing the ideology, and serving as its organizing and orchestrating engine.”

The report then advises that Israel must focus “on the hubs of delegitimization such as London, Toronto, Madrid, or the Bay Area and undermining its catalysts.” To re-interpret the jargon of state security operatives, the report is saying Israel must focus on cities where the BDS movement is strong and try to attack key activists to stop them doing the work they do. There is nothing new in this for Israel (and it continues to carry out in violation of international law any number of extra-territorial actions in defence of Zionism). The apartheid logic does not remain contained within Israel's borders. Israel, in order to maintain its apartheid system, must attack anyone that is successful in exposing it. The Reut document states clearly that “Israel is faced with a potentially existential threat, and must treat it as such by focusing its intelligence agencies, allocating appropriate resources, developing new knowledge, designing a strategy, and executing it.” The logic of the defence of an apartheid state, as in the case of South Africa, leads to a ratcheting up of repression.

The Reut Institute report also urges Israel to cultivate its own networks and catalysts. All indications suggest that they are failing hopelessly at this task. This year's attempts by the pro-

apartheid camp to undermine Israeli Apartheid Week were breathtakingly stupid. At the top of the list would have to be Israel's infamous "Size Doesn't Matter" campaign: if all Israel has to defend its actions are pictures of beaches, women in bikinis, and thinly veiled references to male organs – they are in deep trouble. The pro-Israeli students egged on to confront IAW activists and speakers show an utter lack of initiative or ability to think for themselves. In any debate, they simply recited a list of five questions they have been taught to ask seemingly without any knowledge of the region or critical capacity to engage actively in argument. In contrast, BDS student activists are producing inspiring posters and music, organizing creative actions, building solidarity with other struggles for social justice. One can hardly blame the pro-Israel students though – it is an unpleasant and impossible task to support apartheid and make it look aesthetically pleasing at the same time.

This year marks five years since the BDS call from Palestine. The successes have been plenty and the movement is gaining momentum. The fact that a report urges Israel to consider this movement an existential threat means the campaign is hitting a nerve in the apartheid psyche. Israel is not used to fighting non-military battles. But it seems they want to bring a different type of fight to the "hubs." In true Israeli fashion the Reut institute has already mentioned the term "sabotage" and the use of "intelligence agencies" as way to harass the growing Palestinian solidarity movement and the BDS campaign. But we know we are on the right side of this struggle. So from the Toronto hub of 'Israel delegitimization,' we say "yalla bring it." •

Rafeef Ziadah is a founding member of the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA) in Toronto and an organizer of Israeli Apartheid Week. Her latest CD, "Hadeel," can be heard and purchased at www.rafeefziadah.ca. This article was first published by Socialist Project in The Bullet

Footnotes

1. See "The Delegitimization Challenge: Creating a Political Firewall," (retrieved March 2, 2010). The Reut Institute focuses on providing strategic support to the Israeli state, often around its 'national security' concerns.
2. Palestinian United Call for BDS against Israel.
3. Call for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.
4. For a detailed report on this see United Against Apartheid, Colonialism and Occupation.

Socialist Voice #417, March 14, 2010

Haiti's Earthquake Victims in Peril

by Roger Annis

It's been nearly eight weeks since the devastating earthquake in Haiti and familiar patterns of interference and neglect by the major powers that dominate the country are firmly entrenched.

Notwithstanding heroic efforts of ordinary Haitian people, Haitian government officials and agencies, and many international organizations, a grave health risk hovers over the people residing in the earthquake zone or who have fled beyond it. Meanwhile, the direction of Haiti's reconstruction remains entirely undetermined.

'Few events of such ferocity'

According to a February study by the Inter-American Development Bank, the cost of physical damage from Haiti's earthquake ranges from \$8 billion to \$13 billion. It says, "there are few events of such ferocity as the Haiti 2010 earthquake."

The study looks at natural disasters over the past 40 years and concludes that the death toll, per capita, of Haiti's earthquake is four times or more higher than any other disaster in this time period. Nearly 24,000 people per million of Haiti's population died. The total estimated death toll is well over 200,000. The closest equivalent is 4,000 per million, in the 1972 earthquake that struck Nicaragua.

The Partners In Health agency estimates some 1.3 million people were left without shelter by the earthquake. The majority of those people still do not have adequate emergency shelter nor access to potable water, food and medical attention.

According to US AID, there are approximately 600,000 displaced people living in 416 makeshift camps in Port-au-Prince. Sanitation conditions in the camps remain a grave concern. With heavy seasonal rains fast approaching, the population is extremely vulnerable to exposure and water-borne disease.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an alert on March 4 about another deadly danger that lurks: malaria. It said, "Displaced persons living outdoors or in temporary shelters and thousands of emergency responders in Haiti are at substantial risk for malaria."

Each year, Haiti has 30,000 confirmed cases of malaria. Officials believe the actual number is closer to 200,000.

Partners In Health says it has established clinics in five of the makeshift settlement in Port au Prince, serving some 80,000 to 100,000 people.

A 'broadly insufficient' relief effort

Two leading directors of Doctors Without Borders have called the relief effort to date "broadly insufficient." In a March 5 interview, they say that, "The lack of shelter and the hygiene

conditions represent a danger not only in terms of public health, but they are also an intolerable breach of the human dignity of all these people.”

They call conditions in the makeshift refugee camps where many survivors still struggle to survive “shocking” and “shameful.”

Partners In Health voiced similar concerns in a March 5 press release and conference call. They called on governments and NGOs to do a better job addressing the “inhumane and rapidly deteriorating conditions on the ground in Haiti.”

PIH Executive Director Ophelia Dahl, recently returned from Haiti, told the conference call, “We witnessed hundreds of thousands of people living in makeshift temporary shelters; spontaneous settlements made of scraps of cardboard and plastic bags. What little people have is soaked, because they’re sleeping in the rain, and the makeshift shelters are already breaking down and dissolving. The conditions for the homeless and displaced people are absolutely inhumane and getting worse every single day.”

‘We are issuing a call to action’

Under pressure from international agencies, the Haitian government has pulled back on its appeal for tent camps to be established to meet the displaced population’s needs. Since January, U.S. AID and some UN agencies have refused such calls, instead arguing for a policy that US AID calls, “Thinking Outside the Tent.” Victims are directed to return to their shattered neighbourhoods and fend for themselves, albeit with promises of provision of building materials such as corrugated iron sheets for protection from the rains.

But those who have congregated into makeshift camps are there precisely because provision of aid to neighbourhoods has proven insufficient or entirely lacking.

Why the refusal to build large and secure camps? Could it be a fear that earthquake victims will be better placed to voice their concerns over the direction of the country? A Wall Street Journal article on March 8 reported, “Inside the many tent cities now home to hundreds of thousands of people, a rudimentary social order is beginning to emerge as committees agitate to secure food, water and supplies in high demand from international aid organizations.”

That’s the story of the Morne Lazarre neighbourhood in Petionville, a district on the outskirts of Port au Prince. There, the community school SOPUDEP has played a heroic role in organizing medical treatment and food and water supplies to the local population and even to other affected areas. School Director Réa Dol’s efforts are featured in a recent video documentary produced by the *New York Times*.

Conditions are also critical outside the earthquake zone. Cap Haitien, Haiti’s second largest city located 120 km north of Port au Prince, has received an estimated influx of 50,000 refugees. Its mayor, Michel St. Croix, recently told the *Miami Herald*, “We need housing, sanitation, security — we need everything.” He said the city has received next to no assistance from the United Nations nor the International Red Cross.

‘Rebuild Haiti’

PIH is calling for more international support to the ministries and agencies of the Haitian government. Chief Program Officer Ted Constan told its March 5 conference call, “Of the aid money coming into Haiti, the Haitian government is seeing a very small amount – about \$1 of every \$100.

“The government of Haiti is standing up on its feet: staff are returning to the General Hospital, they are running vaccination camps, they are running registration drives for displaced people, they are maintaining and strengthening their presence at the airport. We need to make sure aid money is used to capacitate and hold accountable the government of Haiti – it’s the only real solution to these challenges over the long term.”

Constan spoke of the “sad fact” that the Haitian Ministry of Health does not even have vehicles in which to move around.

President Rene Préval arrived in Washington on March 8 for several days of talks as the U.S. Congress prepared to vote on further aid spending in Haiti. He told reporters in Miami while en route, “What’s most important is the philosophy of the reconstruction. It’s not just ‘reconstruct Port-au-Prince.’ It’s ‘rebuild Haiti’.”

Decades of neglect of the provinces and agriculture, Préval said, have forced people into the overcrowded capital city. This economic migration must be turned around, he argues. “We need to put jobs in the provinces, and for that you need roads, electricity, education, health.”

In an interview with Associated Press on March 5, Haiti’s Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive repeated his government’s growing concern with the international aid effort. “Too many people are raising money without any controls, and don’t explain what they’re doing with it.”

Préval says the direction of international aid is becoming a barrier to the creation of government institutions and of economic activity that could gradually supply more and more of the country’s needs.

Every foreign government in Haiti pays lip service to the principle of strengthening the capacities of the Haitian government, its ministries and agencies. But most have failed that test. In a speech by PIH founder Paul Farmer to a conference of GlobeMed in Chicago on March 5, he said a recent study of financial promises made to Haiti at a UN donors conference in April 2009 showed that of the more than \$400 million aid dollars promised, only fifteen percent was delivered by the time of the earthquake.

Farmer warned against the “trauma vultures” descending on Haiti. He asked why so many years of aid and charitable funds going to Haiti has left the country poorer than ever.

Mark Turner, a spokesman with the International Organization for Migration, voiced concerns over aid to the *Miami Herald* on March 9. “Many people have got very profound motivations for doing this work,” he said. “But organizationally, the aid industry is like corporations. A budget

depends on a big job that is high profile, and if you want budget, you want staff, you have to be here.”

The record of international donors will again be put to the test when a UN-organized donors conference convenes in New York City on March 31.

Canadian government and media silent on the looming dangers

If some relief agencies are voicing concern about the relief effort, it's being largely ignored in Canada. Haiti's desperate plight has fallen off the radar of Canada's media.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter Mackay visited Haiti on March 6 and 7 and he gave a glowing report on Canada's relief work. He told CBC Radio news, “Canada's contribution in Haiti was among the quickest and has had the most impact.”

Canada was one of the few large countries in the world that did not send civilian emergency rescue teams to Haiti. Its official aid mission arrived one week after the earthquake in the form of two warships and 2,000 military personnel. They pitched into the relief effort and earned praise for their work. But most of the assistance brought by the military, including its field hospital in Léogâne and its emergency health center in Jacmel, have now been withdrawn.

Deep Hundal, a student in Vancouver who volunteered in the earthquake zone area where the Canadian military was present says the needs in Haiti will go on for years. He explains, “The Canadian military is not a relief agency. It helped out with short-term needs. Aid and reconstruction is a long-term process. Who is going to pick up where the military's work left off?”

Speaking in Parliament on March 11 on the government's response to the earthquake, Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared, “Ships of the Atlantic fleet were immediately ordered to Haiti from Halifax, loaded with relief supplies.”

A report in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* the following day refuted Harper's claim. HMCS Halifax and HMCS Athabasca, in fact, carried precious little supplies beyond the needs of their crew and the additional military personnel they carried. And herein lies a clue to the thinking and planning of Canadian political and military leaders.

Like their U.S. counterparts, the first response of Canada's leaders was concern and preoccupation that the earthquake disaster would open space for the Haitian people to retake some of the sovereign political ground lost following the overthrow of their elected government in 2004. The first actions of all the foreign militaries dispatched to Haiti was to flood the earthquake zone with heavily armed patrols and to otherwise ensure the “security” of the respective cities where they were assigned. The U.S. demanded and received complete control over the national airport in Port au Prince.

Hope for Haiti in Latin America

A different kind of aid was offered to Haiti by the people and governments of Cuba and Venezuela. This was the subject of a public forum in Vancouver on March 5 titled “Hope for Haiti in Latin America.”

Speaking on a panel that included Professor Jon Beasley-Murray of the University of British Columbia and Larry Keuhn of the BC Teachers Federation, writer and author Federico Fuentes from Venezuela detailed that country’s response to the crisis. It landed teams of aid and medical workers within hours of the earthquake and quickly assisted in erecting shelter. It has cancelled Haiti’s outstanding debt to Venezuela and is providing free fuel during the reconstruction process.

Prior to the earthquake, Cuba had some 350 health professionals volunteering in Haiti. That number, including graduates and students from the Latin American Medical School (ELAM) in Cuba, has expanded considerably.

Since 2005, 550 Haitian doctors have graduated from ELAM. The school received its first Haitian students in 1999. Currently, there are 570 students from Haiti attending the school.

Fuentes commented to the forum, “The ALBA economic and social agreement among nine countries of Latin America and the Caribbean shows a different path of development for Haiti than the one imposed on it for years and decades by the United States and its allies. Among ALBA member countries, economic and social exchanges are based on principles of equality and solidarity.”

An important source of news and analysis on Haiti is the new website Haiti Relief and Reconstruction Watch. Much information in this article was obtained from sources it cited. Timely and informative articles and videos are also posted to the website of the Canada Haiti Action Network and the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti.

Roger Annis is a coordinator of the Canada Haiti Action Network and its Vancouver affiliate, Haiti Solidarity BC.

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HAITI: THE JOB OF NATIONS

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The Haitian people have endured a collective test of faith and will of biblical proportions ever since 16th century slave traders kidnapped them and sent them from Africa to the New World. From the start, the story of the Haitians has been one of resistance and suffering, beginning with the first successful slave revolt in the Western hemisphere, when, led by Toussaint L’Ouverture, the slaves overthrew French colonial rule. It was not long, however, before the French returned to bleed their former colony with more than a hundred years of heavy “reparations.”

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Haitians bore the afflictions of foreign exploitation, deforestation, and their own corrupt leaders. Even as President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed his non-intervention doctrine, U.S. troops were occupying Haiti. For decades — under the Good Neighbour and then Cold War policies — U.S.-backed dictators Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier looted the Haitian people with the aid of the murderous Tonton Macoutes.

When Haitians finally overthrew the despised dictators and voted for the reformist priest Jean Bertrand Aristide, on a platform of development and social justice, foreign investors and wealthy Haitians staged a coup backed by Washington and led by a former CIA agent. The 2004 coup was actually a U.S., French, and Canadian joint venture. While U.S. marines occupied the National Palace on February 29, Canadian forces secured the airport from whence Aristide was flown out of the country and into forced exile. The coup had no popular support and so the U.S. engineered the stationing of a United Nations “peacekeeping” force there. In the days after the kidnapping of Aristide, the Haitian National Police carried out illegal mass detentions, numerous disappearances, and summary executions of Aristide supporters.

Canada pursued its nefarious role in Haiti by providing financing as well as diplomatic and “security” support to the installed government of Gérard Latortue (who had been flown in from Florida to head up the government). A combination of the reconstituted Haitian National Police (HNP), associated paramilitaries, and foreign police and military forces (now operating under the aegis of the United Nations) acted to suppress movements demanding the restoration of democratic rule.

This was the shape that Canadian “aid” took in the period leading up to the earthquake, with media joining officials in whitewashing our intervention as a charitable mission. And in the past five years, the same countries now scrambling to send emergency assistance have consistently voted against any extension of the UN mission’s mandate beyond its immediate military purpose.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the Haitian government was so ill-prepared to deal with the calamitous January 12 earthquake. Under the de facto rule of a foreign military force and hamstrung by imposed neoliberal economic policy, the government has been unable to invest in its people or regulate its economy in any way as to mitigate the prevailing destitution. According to the best available estimates, about three-quarters of the population lives on less than \$2 per day, and more than fifty-six percent on less than \$1 per day. It is this poverty and powerlessness that account for the magnitude of the horror in Port-au-Prince today.

And what of assistance to the devastated nation? U.S. intervention immediately created a series of delays reminiscent of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Instead of distributing food and water to the needy or rescuing the people in the poorest neighbourhoods, U.S., Canadian, European, and UN missions worried about making those areas “secure,” while U.S. troops fed and watered white foreigners and rich Haitians. As a result, untold numbers of people have died needlessly in the rubble of Port-au-Prince.

We join with the Canada Haiti Action Network in calling for the renewal of Haitian sovereignty

in determining collective priorities and decisions. Foreign troops must go. Haiti's remaining foreign debt must be immediately forgiven. International aid — in the form of grants not loans — must now be directed away from neo-liberal adjustment, sweatshop exploitation, and non-governmental charity, and towards systematic investment in Haiti's own people and government.

Socialist Voice #418, March 15, 2010

Tour Builds Venezuela Solidarity in Canada

by John Riddell

Federico Fuentes and Kiraz Janicke concluded their ten-day tour of Canada on March 7, with a rally in Vancouver entitled “Change the System, Not the Climate.” Fuentes shared the platform with Pablo Solon, Bolivia’s UN ambassador and chief spokesperson on climate change.

Fuentes described the leading role played by Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, together with Bolivia’s Evo Morales, in rallying forces to oppose the climate sell-out by Canada and other rich countries at the recent UN conference in Copenhagen.

Fuentes and Janicke are Australian-based activists who live in Venezuela and write for Venezuelanalysis.com and other publications. Fuentes is also editor of the Bolivia Rising blog and an associate of the Centro Internacional Miranda, a government-funded research institute in Caracas.

The Fuentes-Janicke tour included almost two dozen presentations, attended by audiences totalling 800 persons. Meetings were held in Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Waterloo, Vancouver, and Victoria.

The tour provided a vivid picture of the state of Venezuela solidarity across the country. “Meetings were sponsored by a wide spectrum of groups, including every Venezuela solidarity current in the cities where we spoke,” says Fuentes. “I was repeatedly told that the audiences were not the same old faces. Many new people came, asking probing questions about Venezuelan reality.” Yet almost all those present agreed in supporting the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela, he adds.

“Typically, people hung around after the meetings, full of questions,” Fuentes says.

“Take Montreal, for example,” says Janicke. “Meetings were sponsored by all three local groups: the Bolivarian Society, Hands Off Venezuela, and the Peace Base, with strong presence and moral support from the local Venezuelan consulate. Federico and I had fruitful discussions with consular and embassy representatives in Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto, and we distributed many copies of the embassy’s excellent publication, *The Bolivarian* (www.misionvenezuela.org).

The nature of events varied widely. “There were graduate seminars and open campus meetings; union gatherings and city-wide events,” says tour organizer Suzanne Weiss. “Federico and Kiraz related the Bolivarian process to Venezuela’s support for world struggles: Haiti and Bolivia (in Vancouver), Palestine (in Waterloo), Indigenous nations (in Kingston).”

In Vancouver, Fuentes spoke at a luncheon of the Vancouver & District Labour Council as well as at a regional meeting of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. “They wanted to know more about the labour movement in Venezuela,” Fuentes says. “They were interested in the labour

tours of Venezuela organized by the Australia Venezuela Solidarity Network. They wanted to help Bolivarian unions in Venezuela win support in the International Labour Organization.”

In Toronto, the main tour events formed part of a “Three Days for Venezuela” event co-sponsored by eleven solidarity and progressive organizations. Fuentes and Janicke were among more than 25 presenters at an all-day Venezuela teach-in. “About 100 participants took part in the twelve different workshops and plenaries,” Weiss reports. “After a long day of discussion, a good majority of participants stayed for the final session, on organizing solidarity in Canada.”

Participants in the teach-in represented a wide range of opinion on Venezuela, Weiss notes. “There was a frank exchange among different viewpoints. But all were agreed that Venezuela faces grave dangers today. Everyone stood firm with Venezuela against threats from imperialism and rightist forces within the country.”

Probing Questions

“The most frequently asked question,” Fuentes says, “was what would happen to Venezuela if Chavez were removed from the scene — or, another variant — whether the Venezuelan process was too much of a top-down process. I tried to explain Chavez’s indispensable role in linking together a Bolivarian movement that is both socially and ideologically very diverse. I talked of the movement’s great strength at the grass roots, and of how it has progressed through an interplay between initiatives at the base and at the presidential level.”

There was much interest in questions concerning oil and the environment as well as the community councils, Fuentes says.

“Almost all questions were sympathetic to the Venezuelan process,” Janicke recalls. “I was asked about the character of nationalizations, popular education, what the changes mean for people’s lives, and whether socialism in Venezuela is possible. Others asked what Canada’s role is in Venezuela and why [foreign affairs minister] Peter Kent is making such sharp attacks on Venezuela’s government.”

According to Weiss, the tour highlights the great potential to expand support for the Venezuelan people in their quest for sovereignty and twenty-first century socialism. “There is an urgent need today to broaden the active solidarity movement beyond the ideologically committed, to a broader spectrum of progressive opinion in Canada,” says Weiss. “The tour shows that this can be done. The Venezuela solidarity movement is still small. But its participants come from many backgrounds, many milieus; they can be catalysts for action on a broader stage. The solidarity movement can become more inclusive and more diverse in point of view — yet remain firmly united in defending the revolutionary process in Venezuela.”

For further information on the tour and to contact sponsoring organizations, email [email deleted]. Socialist Project has posted a video of the tour meeting in Toronto.

TOUR EVENTS

February 25, Toronto

- Demonstration in defence of Venezuela outside Venezuelan consulate.

February 26, Toronto

- Graduate seminar at York University, Toronto.
- City-wide forum on “Venezuela: Profile of a People’s Movement”.

February 27, Toronto

- Teach-in on “Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution — The Second Decade.”
Sponsors: Ontario Public Interest Research Group, Toronto ? Centre for Social Justice ? Barrio Nuevo o Hands Off Venezuela ? Latin America Solidarity Network, Toronto ? Latin@s Canada ? Louis Riel Bolivarian Circle o Socialist Project ? Toronto Bolivia Solidarity ? Toronto Haiti Action Committee ? Venezuela We Are With You Coalition/Coalicion Venezuela Estamos Contigo

March 1, Kingston

- Meeting on “Indigenous Resistance and Popular Sovereignty in Bolivia and Venezuela.”

March 1, Ottawa

- Meeting at headquarters of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, sponsored by Socialist Project and co-sponsored by the Critical Social Research Collaborative, Salvadorian Canadian Association of Ottawa, Territorio Libre, and Communist Party of Canada.

March 2, Waterloo

- “Venezuela’s Support for Palestinian Struggle” at Israeli Apartheid Week.

March 2, Ottawa and Gatineau

- Meetings at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University in Ottawa.
- Meeting at the Universite du Quebec (Outaouais campus).

March 3, Toronto

- “Popular Education and Endogenous Development in Venezuela,” public seminar at Ontario Institute of Studies in Education.

March 3, Victoria

- “The Bolivarian Revolution: The Second Decade— Profile of a People’s Movement,” Goods for Cuba Campaign and the Island Solidarity Centre Society.

March 4-5, Montreal

- “The Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela: Internal and External Threats,” meetings at McGill University, Dawson College, Universite du Quebec à Montreal, Concordia University, visit organized by Societe Bolivarienne du Quebec/Hands Off Venezuela, supported by Base de Paix Montreal.

March 4-7, Vancouver

- “Venezuela: The State of the Bolivarian Revolution,” sponsored by Vancouver Socialist Forum.
- “Hope for Haiti in Latin America,” organized by Haiti Solidarity BC.
- “Venezuelan Labour in Revolution,” luncheon with Vancouver and District Labour Council and meeting with Public Service Alliance of Canada Regional Council.
- “Change the System, Not the Climate,” citywide forum sponsored by Canada Bolivia Solidarity Committee, Vancouver Socialist Forum, Hands Off Venezuela Western Canada Chapter, Unitarian Church of Vancouver Social Justice Committee.

Socialist Voice #419, March 29, 2010

After Copenhagen: How Can We Save the World?

by **Ian Angus**

Ian Angus, editor of Climate and Capitalism, gave this talk on March 26 at O Clima Farto de Nós? (Is the Climate Sick of Us?), a conference organized by the Left Bloc and the European Left in Lisbon, Portugal.

The December fiasco in Copenhagen has posed a major challenge to the left, indeed to everyone who wants to defend our world and humanity.

The world's rich countries went to Copenhagen not to fight global warming, but to block any action that might weaken the narrow national interests of their corporate rulers. As Bolivia's ambassador, Pablo Solón, writes,

“For rich countries, the key issues in negotiations were finance, carbon markets, competitiveness of countries and corporations, business opportunities along with discussions about the political makeup of the US Senate. There was surprisingly little focus on effective solutions for reducing carbon emissions.”

Even if they had reached agreement, it would have focused on the fraud of carbon trading, not on slashing emissions by rapidly phasing out coal and oil, as the crisis demands.

As the summit closed, United States President Barack Obama put forward a document adopted in a backroom meeting that excluded most of the delegates and that ignored the concerns of most of the world's nations without discussion. With no timelines, no targets, and no enforcement mechanism, the Copenhagen Accord is a huge step backwards.

The Kyoto Protocol was clearly inadequate, but as Fidel Castro wrote recently, the Copenhagen Accord is “nothing more than a joke.”

The so-called world leaders spoke passionately to the cameras about the need to fight climate change. But that was just theatre: in practice, they wrecked hopes for a meaningful fight.

Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez pointed out the striking contrast between the rich nations' response to climate change and their response to the banking crisis. He quoted one of the banners in the demonstration outside: “If the climate were a bank, they would have saved it by now.”

Why won't they act?

To a naïve observer, this must seem bizarre. Climate change will affect everyone, including the children and grandchildren of politicians and corporate leaders.

If you ask any of them individually, our rulers would undoubtedly say that they want their children and grandchildren to live in a stable and sustainable world.

So why do their actions contradict their words?

Why do they seem determined, in practice, to leave their children and grandchildren a world of poisoned air and water, a world of floods and droughts and escalating climate disasters?

Why have they repeatedly sabotaged international efforts to adopt even half-hearted measures to cut greenhouse gas emissions?

When they do consider or implement responses to the climate crisis, why do they always support solutions that do not work, that cannot possibly work?

Karl Marx had a wonderful phrase for the bosses and their agents – the big shareholders and executives and top managers and the politicians they own – a phrase that explains why they invariably act against the present and future interests of humanity. These people, he said, are “personifications of capital.” Regardless of how they behave at home, or with their children, their social role is that of capital in human form.

They don’t act to stop climate change because the changes needed by the people of this world are directly contrary to the needs of capital.

Capital has no conscience. Capital has no children or grandchildren. Capital has only one imperative: it has to grow.

As Joel Kovel says, “Capitalism can no more survive limits on growth than a person can live without breathing.”

Only profit counts

Under capitalism, the only measure of success is how much is sold, and how much profit is made, every day, every week, every year. It doesn’t matter that they are producing and selling vast quantities of products that are directly harmful to both humans and nature, or that many commodities cannot be produced without spreading disease, destroying the forests that produce the oxygen we breathe, demolishing ecosystems, and treating our water, air and soil as sewers for the disposal of industrial waste.

It all contributes to profits, and thus to the growth of capital – and that’s what counts.

In *Capital*, Marx wrote that from a capitalist’s perspective, raw materials such as metals, minerals, coal, stone, etc. are “furnished by Nature gratis.” The wealth of nature doesn’t have to be paid for or replaced when it is used – it is there for the taking.

That’s true not only of raw materials, but also of what are sometimes called “environmental services” – the water and air that have been absorbing capitalism’s waste products for centuries. They have been treated as free sewers and free garbage dumps, “furnished by Nature gratis.”

Capitalism combines an irresistible drive to grow, with an irresistible drive to create waste and pollution. If nothing stops it, capitalism will expand both those processes infinitely.

But the earth is not infinite. The atmosphere and the oceans and the forests are very large, but ultimately they are finite, limited resources – and capitalism is now pressing against those limits. The 2006 WWF Living Planet Report concludes,

“The Earth’s regenerative capacity can no longer keep up with demand – people are turning resources into waste faster than nature can turn waste back into resources.”

My only disagreement with that statement is that it places the blame on “people” as an abstract category. In fact, the devastation is caused by the global capitalist system, and by the tiny class of exploiters that profits from capitalism’s continued growth. The great majority of people are victims, not perpetrators.

In particular, capitalist pollution has passed the physical limit of the ability of nature to absorb carbon dioxide and other gases while keeping the earth’s temperature steady. As a result, the world is warmer today than it has been for 100,000 years, and the temperature continues to rise.

Embedded in capitalism’s DNA

Greenhouse Gas Emissions are not unusual or exceptional. Pouring shit into the environment is a fundamental feature of capitalism. Waste and pollution and ecological destruction are built into the system’s DNA.

How big a problem is this?

A recent study conducted for the United Nations found that the world’s 3,000 largest corporations cause 1.6 trillion euros [US\$2.2 trillion] in environmental damage, every year. More than half of that is caused by greenhouse gas emissions.

If they were forced to pay for the damage they cause, their total profits would be reduced by a third. Many including some of the world’s largest and most powerful companies, would have no profits at all if they could not offload these environmental costs onto society,

That’s what the pioneering environmental economist William Kapp meant nearly sixty years ago, when he wrote, “Capitalism must be regarded as an economy of unpaid costs.”

In short, pollution is not an accident, and it is not a “market failure.” It is the way the system works.

Former US vice-president Al Gore In his book *An Inconvenient Truth*, quoted the American socialist writer Upton Sinclair: “It’s difficult to get a man to understand something if his salary depends upon his not understanding it.” That is an oversimplification of the complex relationship between consciousness and social context, but it is fundamentally true.

Al Gore himself, who seems to understand the seriousness of the climate crisis and who sincerely wants to solve it, cannot accept the *really inconvenient truth* that the crisis is caused by the system that made him rich, the system that he has devoted his life to defending. He cannot accept any change that limits or restricts capitalist operations, let alone one that challenges its fundamental nature.

That's why the so-called world leaders spoke passionately in Copenhagen about the need to fight climate change, while in practice ensuring that nothing was done.

The other side of Copenhagen

But that was only one side of Copenhagen. The rich nations didn't get everything their own way. The great majority of the world's peoples, those whose lives are at stake, were also represented in Copenhagen, inside and outside of the conference centre.

Inside the summit, protests and dissent from the global south could not be ignored. Delegates from the poorest nations staged several walkouts to protest the dirty Copenhagen deal. They chanted: "We will not die quietly."

Opposition to Obama's backroom deal was led by members of the ALBA alliance, particularly Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, along with Sudan and the heroic Pacific island nation of Tuvalu. These countries are small and poor, but in this cause they are moral giants, and they deserve our honour and gratitude.

Bolivia's Evo Morales, the first elected indigenous head of state in South America, condemned Obama's Copenhagen Accord:

"There is a profound difference between their document and the peoples fighting for humanity and the planet.

"This group of friends led by Obama accept that temperatures can increase by 2 degrees Celsius by 2020. This will end the existence of many island states; it will end our snow-capped mountains.

"And Obama only seeks to reduce gas emissions by 50% in 2050. But we want and need 90 to 100% reduction, in order to save the planet."

Evo went beyond proposing emission targets: he called for a legally binding enforcement mechanism.

"We want an International Climate Justice Tribunal that can sanction failure to comply with agreements, so that we can govern based on balance and achieve real solutions."

Outside the hall, climate protesters took over Copenhagen's streets for days. These were the biggest climate demonstrations ever held in Europe.

The unofficial counter-summit, the Klimaforum, attracted 25,000 activists to discuss and debate how the people can force political change. Klimaforum issued a People's Declaration on Climate Change, which was everything the Copenhagen Accord was not.

It called for building "a global movement of movements dedicated to the long-term task of promoting a sustainable transition of our societies".

It proposed four central demands that the movement should support:

- **A complete abandoning of fossil fuels** within the next 30 years, which must include specific milestones for every five-year period. We demand an immediate cut in GHG of industrialized countries of at least 40% compared to 1990 levels by 2020.
- **Recognition, payment and compensation of climate debt** for the overconsumption of atmospheric space and adverse effects of climate change on all affected groups and people.
- **Rejection of purely market-oriented and technology-centred false and dangerous solutions** such as nuclear energy, agro-fuels, carbon capture and storage, Clean Development Mechanisms, biochar, genetically “climate-readied” crops, geo-engineering and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), which deepens social and environmental conflicts.
- **Real solutions to climate crisis** based on safe, clean, renewable and sustainable use of natural resources, as well as transitions to food, energy, land and water sovereignty.

If a movement based on that program is built, it will be a huge step forward. For too long, the conservative wing of the environmental movement, headed by big NGOs, has locked the climate movement into a strategy of lobbying politicians and adapting to corporate power, in the hope of winning petty reforms. The failure at Copenhagen proves once again that backroom lobbying has not worked and will not work.

We are not yet powerful enough to win permanent solutions by ending the capitalist system forever, but we can make the political and economic costs of inaction unacceptable to our capitalist rulers.

To do this we can and must build mass democratic movements against the climate vandals. Mass climate emergency movements in every country are the only force with the potential to force the politicians into effective action against greenhouse gas emissions. That is the only way to win time for the earth and humanity.

That is the most important task we now face.

On to Cochabamba

The most positive result of Copenhagen was the evidence that a mass democratic movement against climate change has already begun to grow.

The next step in building that movement will take place next month in Cochabamba, Bolivia, when thousands of activists from around the world meet, answering Evo Morales’ call for a Peoples’ World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth’s Rights.

The meeting’s ambitious goals include

“(1) To analyze the structural and systemic causes that drive climate change and to propose radical measures to ensure the well-being of all humanity in harmony with nature.

“(2) To discuss and agree on the project of a Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights.

“(3) To agree on proposals for new commitments ... that will guide future actions in those countries that are engaged with life during climate change negotiations....

“(4) To work on the organization of the Peoples’ World Referendum on Climate Change.

“(5) To analyze and develop an action plan to advance the establishment of a Climate Justice Tribunal.

“(6) To define strategies for action and mobilization to defend life from Climate Change and to defend Mother Earth’s Rights.”

That’s an ambitious but absolutely essential agenda. I urge the parties represented here today, along with socialists and climate activists around the world, to endorse that project, to participate in it if possible, and to give its outcome the widest possible publicity and support.

The defeats and achievements in Copenhagen, combined with the Cochabamba conference, offer an historic opportunity and challenge for ecological activists to join hands with workers, with indigenous activists, with anti-imperialist movements here and around the world, to make ecological transformation a central feature of the broader economic and social changes that are so clearly needed.

Together we can stop the climate vandals, together we can build a better world for future generations.

It won’t be easy, and it won’t be quick, but together we can make it happen.

Thank you.