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Socialist Voice #207, October 2, 2007

Internationalism and the Venezuelan Revolution

By Ian Beeching

This year Venezuela surpassed the United States in direct government funding to Latin America and the Caribbean. Its pledges in aid, financing, and energy funding so far this year amount to \$8.8 billion. This commitment has created space for many of the continent's countries to assert their sovereignty from American domination.

How is this possible? The United States has an economy (measured by GDP) the size of 67 Venezuelas. Sixty countries of the world are richer than Venezuela per capita.

The answer is internationalism.

The Venezuelans have realized that prosperity for the people of Venezuela is tied to that of all the world's peoples. Moreover, its physical security from a U.S.-sponsored attack depends on the ties of solidarity it is forging with peoples around the world. One country cannot build a society free of violence and poverty when the world around it is full of the savage barbarism of imperialism and exploitation.

For an integrated Latin America

Ever since the European conquest 500 years ago, Latin America's wealth has been stolen and its development blocked by imperial powers, led first by Spain and Portugal, then by Britain, now by the United States. Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution rests on the conviction that the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean can only be free if they join together in a united stand against imperialism. The Bolivarian movement aims to tear down the barriers to genuine development by integrating the countries of Latin America.

This goal finds expression in a host of specific projects that aim to enhance the independence of Latin American nations through cooperation. For example, Venezuela is joining with Uruguay to build an insulin plant — the largest on the continent. Uruguay has the technology and patents and Venezuela has the financial resources. The plant will free people across the continent from dependence on multinational corporations that charge many, many times what the medication costs to produce.

Oil refineries and factories are being jointly built with numerous countries. In this way, countries are able to build infrastructure that they could not manage alone. Integration is not only economic; there are plans to integrate education and medicine.

Peoples' trade agreement

The heart of Venezuela's internationalist vision is the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, called by its Spanish acronym ALBA ("dawn"). Known as a "people's trade agreement," ALBA is based not on capitalist market principles but on a vision of social welfare and mutual economic aid. For example, Venezuela trades oil to Cuba while thousands of Cuban medical personnel provide services to Venezuela.

Venezuelan aid funds projects such as AIDS treatment in Nicaragua, housing in Dominica, and doctors in Haiti.

When Bolivia was struck with devastating floods this year, Venezuela sent in teams to help the victims of the disaster. In total Venezuela pledged over \$800 million to Bolivia, more than six times the U.S. commitment.

Venezuelan asphalt paves the streets of Bolivia's capital. Venezuela has offered to buy garbage trucks for Haiti and build a dairy cooperative in Argentina. Funding has gone to building an oil refinery in Nicaragua and to electricity plants in Nicaragua, Haiti and Bolivia. Venezuela has given an estimated \$1.6 billion in fuel financing to at least 17 countries.

Venezuela aided Argentina in paying off its debt by buying \$5.1 billion in Argentine bonds. Due to Venezuela's efforts, regional debt to the IMF dropped from \$49 billion in 2003 to \$694 million this year.

Venezuelan aid is not limited to poor underdeveloped countries. Venezuela has supplied subsidized oil to poor communities in the United States and Britain. In the Bronx, in New York City, Venezuelan oil was provided at a 40% reduced rate to poor people. In London, England,

bus fares have been reduced by half for the city's poor because of an agreement between London's mayor and Venezuela, in which London provides technical expertise in public transit in exchange for Venezuelan oil.

A new way of banking

For decades the exploited and poor countries of the world have had to turn to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for loans. With these loans came conditions. Countries were forced to privatize industry and slash education and public services. Crucial infrastructure was sold off and neglected. Profits soared, but so too did poverty, while national economic infrastructures were shattered and national economies wrecked.

To help break dependence on the IMF and World Bank, ALBA has launched the Bank of ALBA. All members of ALBA have equal participation in the bank. The bank grants low interest loans with no strings attached.

Venezuela has also proposed a Bank of the South, which would use billions from Venezuela's reserves for seed money. In the meantime Venezuela has opened its state bank to neighboring countries. Bolivia, Uruguay, Honduras, Guatemala and Haiti can now borrow money with interest rates at 5% compared to up to 35% by private banks.

Two, three, many Vietnams

Venezuela alone cannot provide the resources needed to solve the world's urgent problems of poverty, war, and environmental collapse. But it's making an enormous contribution of resources and political solidarity, and this powerful example can solve the world's problems if the peoples of other countries follow the lead. Venezuela is using economic assistance to promote a political goal: unity of the world's peoples against imperialism. It thus has a fundamentally different purpose than Canada's governmental aid programs, the purpose of which is to increase the power of the Canadian government and the profits of Canadian corporations.

Thus in 2006, when Israel began its brutal bombing campaign and invasion of Lebanon, Venezuela pulled its embassy from Israel. Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez has frequently spoken out against the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq and is strongly opposed to an attack on Iran. Chávez consistently exposes the lies of imperialism and its aim of exploiting the wealth of the world's people for the benefit of a small minority.

Venezuela and other ALBA nations have been the world's most articulate and determined voices in calling for action against climate change and defense of the environment against capitalist profiteers.

As evidence mounts that the United States is seeking regime change in Bolivia and Venezuela, Hugo Chavez has warned that "If U.S. imperialism attacks our peoples, using their lackeys in Venezuela and Bolivia, they can be sure that we're not going to wait with our arms crossed." Chavez has made clear that the people of Venezuela and Bolivia will defend themselves against imperialist aggression. Recalling Guevara's defiant appeal in 1967 to defend Vietnamese, then

under attack by U.S. imperialism, Chávez said, “We will shout with Che Guevara and then one, two, three, four, five, or 10 Vietnams will have to be created in Latin America.”

A document of the United Socialist party of Venezuela (the party which Hugo Chavez has initiated) states, “the current world situation creates, and makes necessary, the formation of an international anti-imperialist bloc on a grand scale” made up of governments, social movements and parties “to unite in action hundreds of millions of people in all the world against imperialism and its wars.”

Solidarity in action

On August 26, Chavez said that “2008 could be a good time to convoke a meeting of left parties in Latin America to organize a new international, an organization of parties and movements of the left in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Venezuela has hosted numerous international gatherings including the World Festival of Youth and Students in 2005 and the World Social Forum in 2006.

Venezuela has given special emphasis to supporting and encouraging indigenous movements across the Western Hemisphere, and Hugo Chávez has identified the socialism of indigenous peoples as one of the main sources for the Bolivarian movement’s vision of “21st Century socialism.”

On August 8, 2007, Venezuela hosted the first International Congress of the Anti-imperialist Indigenous Peoples of Latin America (Abya Yala). A thousand indigenous people from across the Americas converged in San Tomé for this historic event. Among them was a delegation of indigenous activists from Canada who attended on the Venezuelan government’s invitation. (See *The Bears Are Mounting the Silver Eagle to Meet the Condor* and *Declaration of Kumarakapay*)

The revolutionary people of Venezuela are still at an early stage of their struggle for liberation. Yet they have provided an example of what the working and oppressed peoples can achieve when we too rise up in struggle for liberation and social justice.

Socialist Voice #208, October 3, 2007

Nicaragua Today, Part Two: Defying Attacks from the Right, FSLN Government Stays on Course

By Phil Stuart Cournoyer

Part one of this article appeared in on September 18. Phil Stuart Cournoyer is a Nicaraguan citizen and longtime member of the FSLN [Sandinista National Liberation Front (Sandinistas)]. He divides his time between Nicaragua and Canada.

MANAGUA — The unanticipated left turn of the newly elected Frente Sandinista government last January has polarized politics in Nicaragua. Ever belligerent, the White House is actively probing for ways to take advantage of the situation.

The threat of widening conflict has begun to pose the need to rebuild the solidarity movements that brought the Nicaraguan people such effective help during the U.S.-orchestrated “Contra war” two decades ago.

The new Sandinista government surprised every political current when it announced its anti-imperialist turn during last January’s Inauguration Day ceremonies. Since then, it has taken steps toward a more fair and just redistribution of wealth.

Its alliance with Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Iran caught right-wing forces here completely off guard. Their ideologues in the Liberal Alliance Party (ALN, led by Eduardo Montealegre, the U.S. embassy candidate for president) and the editors of the daily *La Prensa* (the traditional mouthpiece of the oligarchy) are evidently shocked and perplexed.

Almost every day, *La Prensa* savages the government and demands that the three opposition parties use their majority in parliament to “save the nation.” They claim President Daniel Ortega has betrayed his campaign pledge to support national reconciliation and delivered the country into the clutches of “that imperial despot” — Hugo Chávez. They never cease to caricature Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo, as an odd pair who seek to prop up “one-family” government, violating national law and the constitution.

Arnoldo Alemán’s Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) has responded more cautiously, with one leader often contradicting another. This reflects its loss of support from big national and international capital and Washington.

Sadly, the leadership of the MRS Alliance (often considered to be to the left of the FSLN) has joined the right-wing campaign, appearing as a caboose on the ALN train. The MRS Alliance says that Nicaragua risks being trapped between two “imperial” powers — the U.S. and Venezuela — and repeating the mistaken choice of allies that allegedly led to the U.S. war against the Sandinista government in the 1980s. They make the absurd claim that Chávez’s alleged “arrogance and interference” is equivalent to real U.S. imperial domination. And they

have admitted to conducting negotiations with the extreme right-wing ALN to cobble together a common slate in the nation-wide municipal elections in November 2008.

The three opposition parties have a majority in the national assembly and have used it at critical points to block government initiatives. They all feel strong pressure to form a new triple alliance (some would say yet another pact) to shackle the FSLN legislative bench. But they offer no coherent and viable economic and social alternative to the government's course. The opposition restricts itself to criticizing the government for its style and alleged totalitarian measures and tendencies.

By contrast, leaders of the COSEP (big business association) have advised right-wing politicians to tone down their attacks. Commenting on a July 19 speech by Ortega, much denounced by right-wing parties, COSEP leader Erwing Kruger said "For us what counts is that the speech called for mutual understanding... We have to work hand in hand not only with the government but with other state powers." He spoke of "a new vision on the part of business with the government, and the government with business."

The Catholic Church hierarchy has also advocated a more cautious course, permitting Cardinal Obando y Bravo to head the National Reconciliation Commission. Its mandate is to aid demobilized soldiers from the national army and the "Contra" armed force.

Citizens' Power Councils

To counteract its minority status in parliament, the FSLN has set up Citizens' Power Councils (CPC), similar to Venezuela's community councils. Organizers say that almost one million of the country's five million people have been drawn into or around grassroots CPCs.

The CPC movement's aim is build up new organs for participatory democracy to help people overcome the real limitations on rights and genuine freedom posed by ossified institutions of "representative democracy" such as the National Assembly and municipal councils.

In August the opposition parties passed a law that deprived the Councils of their legal foundation and state funding, but the president vetoed that law and the government continues to promote the council movement. It has served as a springboard for launching state-funded programs such as the new Zero Usury campaign. Ortega has instructed ministries and municipalities with Sandinista-led local governments to heed CPC decisions in their jurisdictions.

Secretaries and organizers have at times tried to build local CPCs in a top-down way, so many Councils consist mainly of FSLN supporters. To achieve their mission, the fledgling CPCs must try to encompass residents who may back other political parties, and especially those who do not identify with political parties (including a large part of our youth). Failure to be inclusive would lend credence to right-wing claims that the government intends to use the Councils to manipulate grassroots sectors, not empower them.

The clash of forces provoked by the return of the FSLN to power has also agitated the keenly nationalist and anti-imperialist Sandinista movement. It is a mass movement of about half a

million people — workers, farmers, students, military and administrative personnel, small-scale farmers, housewives and single mothers, informal sector workers, etc. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) is the largest Sandinista party, now a powerful mass-based electoral force with a good grip on most municipal governments (and the most populous) in the country.

The FSLN still lacks a political culture of encouraging rank-and-file discussion of problems and prospects. The process of correction and improved performance is far from smooth. This is not new. It is one reason why the 1990 electoral defeat came as such a stunning surprise to FSLN and government leaders at that time — the flow of information back then was one-way, and top down. That situation, brought on by insurrectionary and wartime conditions, can hardly be said to prevail in today's Nicaragua.

Tendencies in the Sandinista movement

The FSLN *needs and wants* to widen its base. Membership has declined significantly since the 1994 party census recorded 420,000 members across the country. This pattern of retreat and withdrawal at the grassroots level is related to a drop in union membership, loss of influence in middle class sectors, and declining influence in the rural areas. That trend may now turn around because of the impact of new government initiatives such as the Zero Hunger program, free health and public education, and low interest loans to small landholders and small business owners.

The FSLN strategy of alliances allowed it to win the presidential elections. One of the most important of its new allies is the Native Miskitu people. The FSLN's nomination of former Contra leader Jaime Morales Carazo as vice-president aimed to link up with the sector of the peasantry that supported the Contras but then found themselves savaged by neoliberalism. The Vice-President's move to the FSLN Unity and Reconciliation Alliance sparked sharper divisions and array among rightwing forces in the tow of the oligarchy.

Like any mass, multiclass and multiethnic party, the FSLN is not monolithic. There are different currents evident within the broad leadership and in secondary layers. The pattern of varied and sometimes counterposed class interests and ideologies in the Sandinista movement took shape over years of setbacks after the defeat of the revolution. For nearly two decades now a "me first, save my own skin" culture and morality has clouded social relations and political life. And the confusion felt by the whole international left following the collapse of the USSR reinforced negative and anti-solidarity trends within society, especially among youth. This environment underlies the persistent pattern of splits and withdrawal that gave rise to rival Sandinista initiatives.

Sandinista dissidents and cross-currents in the MRS Alliance

The main components of the MRS Alliance are two breakaways from the FSLN with similar names, the same acronym, and contrasting trajectories. The Sandinista Renewal Movement (Renovadora), led by Sergio Ramirez and Dora María Tellez, split from the FSLN in a rightward direction in 1995. The Sandinista Reclamation Movement (Rescate), whose leaders include

historic comandante Henry Ruíz and comandante Mónica Baltodano, originated in the FSLN's Democratic Left Current; they left the FSLN last year and formed an electoral alliance with the Renovation party.

Baltodano, a legendary Sandinista combatant who is now an MRS Alliance legislative deputy, attempted in a September 11 article to explain her caucus's confusing performance since their poor electoral results last November.

In the elections, she wrote, the MRS failed to offer "an alternative proposal to the neoliberal governments, one prepared to break from subordination to the Washington consensus.... It was not interested in taking on the profile of a left force." The MRS as a whole "stressed political-institutional changes in place of changing the model," she said.

Baltodano contrasted the Recovery current, composed of "Sandinista fighters recognized for their left militancy ... links and roots in grassroots sectors" with the Renewal grouping in which "those who call themselves centre-left dominate."

Her article pulled back from the MRS's broadside anti-government attacks. She highlighted the new government's abolition of public school and hospital fees, provision of free medicine, and cash grants to the poorest families, as well as the benefits gained through the deal with Venezuela for a secure oil supply, low-interest credit to farmers, health programs, and construction of an oil refinery.

Perhaps Baltodano's article signals that her current is shifting away from more center-right forces in the MRS alliance. That would be positive, and would aid in building national unity to counter mounting imperialist pressure. But she seems not to recognize the danger in the evolution of almost all currents in the MRS: a rapid retreat from Sandinista anti-imperialism and the historic program of the movement founded by Carlos Fonseca.

She pours cold water on Nicaragua's role in the Venezuela-led ALBA initiative. The government "signed on to ALBA with enthusiasm, but were quite discreet about joining in on the proposal to build 21st Century socialism," she observed. "They are not at all clear about real changes to be made to the national economy and the political system."

This cautionary note would not be out of place if Baltodano had clearly supported Nicaragua's entry into ALBA, and if the MRS Alliance had offered solid, viable alternative proposals for steering the economy. But no MRS-inspired current has done so. MRS economic and social policies dovetail with those of the government. Moreover, like many provincial politicians, MRS representatives tend to separate international and national issues — discussing and acting as if our country were a self-sufficient continent, not a dependent, historically oppressed country.

François Houtard, the well-known Belgian campaigner against capitalist globalization, wrote in the Managua daily *El Nuevo Diario* July 25 that the MRS's positions "resort to an ethical discourse as a substitute for social analysis." MRS policies, he said, rest on "well-defined

opposition to all governmental programs and the new Latin American socio-political dynamic, classical theoretical positions of the new postmodern right throughout the world.”

Houtard’s current view is that the FSLN is “closest to being on the Left,” not the MRS party.

Ortega at the UN

At the United Nations on September 25, Daniel Ortega delivered a sweeping and eloquent denunciation of Washington’s wars of aggression, punishment, and occupation. Disregarding the pressure of the U.S. and its allies, he denounced their threats against Iran. Twenty-eight years after the Nicaraguan revolution, “the enemy remains the same, and it is called global imperialist capitalism,” he said.

“Today, what presents itself as the most exemplary democracy is a global, imperialist tyranny,” he argued. Referring to environmental destruction, he said that “now more than ever the survival of humanity is at risk; and global, imperialist and development-driven capitalism is to blame.” [See full text on the Socialist Voice Documents website]

This speech triggered intense political duels in Nicaragua, including a deeply disappointing performance by MRS Alliance deputies in the National Assembly. They helped to draft and signed, along with 45 or so other deputies from the two liberal parties, a bill that condemns the President for his “inflammatory” performance. The bill attacked only Ortega, saying nothing about George Bush’s belligerent speech at the same UN session.

Their preoccupation with electoralism and the enticements of alliances impede them from hearing how many people on the job or street and in poor barrios view Ortega’s performance and general conduct. One trend of thought, to which the MRS bends, is that Nicaragua is sticking its neck out too far — especially the increasingly vocal solidarity with Iran at a time when the U.S. is threatening war. But others say the speech should have been more focused on Nicaraguan and Central American problems, and not have tried to deal with the whole world. For example, many feel that Ortega should have denounced the wall along the U.S.-Mexican frontier, or the deportations of Central American and particularly Nicaraguan workers from the U.S., or unfair competition from U.S. farm produce in regional markets. Still others feel not enough attention was given to global warming and the phenomenon of floods and desertification now advancing in Central America and other parts of our planet.

With hindsight it is easy to imagine a better 20-minute speech. But many of the criticisms are relevant and far from unfriendly — unlike the National Assembly resolution denouncing Ortega’s anti-imperialist stance.

Black and Native support

The FSLN government, in alliance with the Native “Sons of Mother Earth” (Yatama) party on Nicaragua’s Caribbean Coast region, is working to heal the wounds of decades of marginalization, racist neglect, oppression, and internal colonization in two regions in which Native and Black people had been a majority until recently.

This shift involves the inclusion of Native and Black leaders at ministerial and vice-ministerial levels of the central government, and more harmonious and respectful relations with the regional autonomous governments and authorities. Veterans of the struggle for Native land demarcation, such as the well-known Miskitu spokeswoman and lawyer Hazel Lau, have applauded new government moves to reaffirm traditional territorial land title and rights.

The government's effective response to the devastation of Hurricane Felix is also winning support from east-coast communities traditionally distrustful of the Sandinista movement. (Donations to help hurricane victims rebuild can be made through www.yorku.ca/cerlac/felix.htm.)

Twenty-two years ago Indigenous peoples found themselves pitted against the Sandinistas, and in some cases each other, in bloody conflict. Today, they are now co-operating and learning from one another and from the Sandinistas — Natives and non-Natives alike. This road leads to greater contact and interaction with the hemispheric Indigenous upsurge, above all in Bolivia and Ecuador.

Agenda for popular power

Nicaragua's social fabric has been ripped apart by the mass migrations to the U.S. and other countries, mostly young people in search of a livelihood. Most of the population is caught in the daily struggle for bread and shelter. Despite encouraging signs of change, cynicism remains widespread among the poor, the urban middle classes, and the "educated" sectors.

This can change only through struggle, through mass involvement in grassroots movements and national efforts to bring about change. Campaigns around one or more of the following issues could make a good agenda for the Citizens' Power Councils at all levels and regions.

- Free, quality public health and education
- Zero Hunger and Zero Usury
- Spreading literacy
- Ongoing aid and solidarity to Hurricane Felix victims
- Specialized health services for women and girls
- Restore a woman's right to choose therapeutic abortion when her life is at risk
- A livable minimum wage in town and country
- Universal enforcement of Nicaraguan labor and safety laws
- Full compensation by plantation owners to Nemagon (pesticide) victims
- Support to the worldwide movement against capitalist-imposed globalization
- Deeper, ongoing ties with the real alternative, ALBA

- Solidarity with Indigenous peoples and the autonomous institutions on the Caribbean Coast
- Solidarity with Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, with Cuba and Haiti, with Iran and Palestine, and above all with the millions of victims of the imperialist occupation of Iraq.

William Grigsby V., longtime Sandinista and director of Managua's worker-owned Sandinista Radio La Primerisima, argues that grassroots people can and should take hold of the councils for popular power and shape them into a tool of participatory democracy. We can, he believes, break from the pattern of demoralization that has engulfed the country since the 1990 Sandinista defeat.

Pointing to problems created by many would-be careerists and office seekers, he says:

“They may sideline you, censure and take jabs at you again and again. No matter. You have to keep working from below.... Whoever has the opportunity should get involved with the CPCs. And if the secretaries impede our participation, whatever their motive, we have to make another CPC. And then we'll see who has more people.”

Similar discussions and initiatives are taking place in Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and once again in Cuba, albeit in a very different context. Nicaraguans can look to other experiences to help overcome limitations in the process, just as we look to experiences in sister countries to gain pointers on questions of economic recovery and social programs. Operation Miracle and the Yo sí puedo Literacy Drive are both outstanding successes because they are the very breath of international solidarity and collaboration.

Let us hope that soon Nicaragua becomes once more what we were during the eleven year Sandinista revolutionary government — a centre of solidarity, a crossroads of new experiences, and a wellspring of lessons for here and abroad.

Socialist Voice #209, October 4, 2007

A Triumphant Advance in Ecuador

Popular Forces Sweep Constituent Assembly Elections

By Hugo Blanco

Hugo Blanco was leader of the Quechua peasant uprising in the Cuzco region of Peru in the early 1960s. He was captured by the military and sentenced to 25 years in El Fronton Island prison for his activities, but an international defence campaign won his freedom. He continues to play an active role in Peru's indigenous, campesino, and environmental movements, and writes on Peruvian, indigenous, and Latin American issues.

He wrote this article for Socialist Voice on the eve of the sweeping victory of the Country Alliance Movement (Movimiento Alianza País) and President Rafael Correa's anti-imperialist government in the September 30 elections for Ecuador's new Constituent Assembly.

Mercopress reported October 2 that "Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa received a landslide support in the Sunday election for a Constitutional Assembly which will be tasked with reforming the country's constitution and leading it towards what he has defined as XXI Century Socialism." Alianza País will end up with somewhere between 76 and 80 seats of the Assembly's 130 members, enabling Correa "to work, in alliance with smaller groups with a comfortable majority."

Kinto Lucas, writing in Ecuador Rising, notes that "The victory in the Constituent Assembly is the result of years of agitation and struggle by Ecuador's indigenous and social movements along with an unorganized, largely middle-class movement of people known as the forajidos, an Ecuadoran term meaning outlaws or bandits who rebel against the established system. In March when the Congress and the right wing political parties tried to sabotage the elections for the Assembly, tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Quito, blocking the entrances to Congress and backing the disbarment of the Congressional members who wanted to suppress the elections." —Phil Stuart Cournoyer

Today Ecuador is undergoing a triumphant advance. Of the three anti-imperialist governments in South America that are now pursuing a process of change, the regime in Ecuador has the broadest support.

Bolivia is advancing, but the Right, which holds office in four departments, has unfortunately been able to line up a sector of the middle class against change.

In Venezuela the Right achieved some success in its campaign of lies against the supposed violation of "freedom of the press" with regard to a company whose broadcast permit should have been lifted when it supported a coup d'état. Instead, it was permitted to continue through to the end of the license term.

In Ecuador, as in Bolivia, victory in the presidential elections was no more than one successful step in a long process of massive popular struggles. This process had seen the repeated ouster of presidents who, obedient to the interests of the large corporations and the United States, had promoted the pillage of their countries and accelerated environmental degradation, driving their countries into poverty.

The previous Ecuadorian president, to gain the support needed to govern, had initially surrounded himself with some progressive ministers, a set-up that soon collapsed. One of these transitory ministers was Rafael Correa, and his fleeting presence as minister led him to be seen as someone who could direct the economy. He was elected president in 2006.

The people deeply despised parliament, the heart of reaction. They demanded a Constituent Assembly. Correa not only promised to convoke such an assembly, but refused to present candidates for parliament, convincing voters of his consistency.

After his election, Correa paid homage to the indigenous mass movement that was so crucial in his victory by going to the mountain village of Zumbahua to receive a staff of office from the indigenous peoples. Promising that his would be “an indigenous government,” he explained, “This is not an epoch of change; it is a change of epochs.”

Once elected, of course, he ran into the frontal opposition of the reactionary parliament. Not only did it stand in total opposition to convening the Constituent Assembly; it even had the nerve to vote a huge increase in deputies’ salaries.

The first great battle was to hold a referendum approving election of a Constituent Assembly. Parliament was dead against that, of course, but the highest electoral authority decided to go ahead with the vote. The deputies voted to fire that tribunal’s chairperson. But he responded that it was the deputies that should be ousted, for having moved against him in violation of the constitution.

This disagreement was resolved by the people through mass demonstrations that surrounded the parliament. Fortunately, Correa did not restrain the people as Juan Perón of Argentina and Salvador Allende of Chile did in the past, when they were threatened by a right-wing coup. Correa did the exact opposite. He said that the people had every right to mobilize peacefully and that this mobilization was the only guarantee that the needed changes could go forward.

In March 2007, the electoral authority removed 57 deputies for having obstructed convocation of the Constituent Assembly. The law provided for their replacement by alternates chosen by their parties. Of course the parties, which did not recognize the deputies’ removal, ordered the alternates to refuse to be sworn in. But such is the hunger for posts in these circles that many alternates quickly took the oath and voted approval for the referendum on convening a Constituent Assembly. This should not be taken as a sign that the present deputies are any less reactionary and corrupt than their predecessors.

The referendum was held on April 15, and 80% voted for convening the Assembly, with 10% opposed and 10% spoiling their ballots.

The Constituent Assembly elections will take place on September 30. In my opinion, this assembly will not have the rough ride experienced by its equivalent in Bolivia. It will be a great triumph for the people, from which will emerge a constitution far different from the present one, which serves to exploit the country and subject its people to poverty. The new constitution will be a tool enabling the Ecuadorian people to manage their country in the interests of the population in a framework of respect for the environment.

That of course will not end the struggle. The process of liberation is lengthy. The Ecuadorian people have taken control of the government, but they do not have power, which remains in the hands of the large corporations. The election of the Constituent Assembly will be an important step in this struggle.

Greetings, brothers and sisters of Ecuador!

September 28, 2007

(Translation by John Riddell)

Support Hugo Blanco and Lucha Indígena

Hugo Blanco has just completed a Canadian speaking and solidarity tour, during which he established links with Indigenous activists in Canada on behalf of the Peruvian publication he edits, Lucha Indígena (Indigenous Struggle).

Friends of Hugo Blanco in Canada have established the Lucha Indígena Canada-Peru Solidarity Network to raise funds and material support for Lucha Indígena's work, and to promote an exchange of news, information, analysis, and human contact between indigenous activists and their allies in the two countries.

Socialist Voice #210, October 8, 2007

Today More Than Ever, the People Rise With Pride, Strength and Dignity

By Daniel Ortega

Speech by the President of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega Saavedra, before the 62th General Assembly of the United Nations, September 25, 2007

Good afternoon esteemed representatives, brothers and sisters of the communities that make up this Organization of the United Nations.

I would like to begin by remembering the millions of human beings who have been victims of policies of colonialism and neocolonialism.

Let us begin by remembering the victims of the Holocaust; the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the victims of the slavery of Apartheid; to the victims of the wars and occupation of Vietnam and Afghanistan, the Dominican Republic, Granada, Panama and Nicaragua.

Let us remember the heroic and noble Cuban victims, who have suffered all manner of aggression and a brutal and inhumane blockade. Let us remember the five Cuban heroes, prisoners of the empire because they fought against terrorism.

I want to remember the victims of the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center; the millions of men and women that have been and continue to be victims of the genocide created by global capitalism.

To the victims of discrimination and Apartheid, created by those that deny their entry into the developed countries; I would like to remember the people of Latin American who try to enter the United States, and the people of Africa, of Asia, who try to enter European nations.

Our reflection, our appreciation and our solidarity for the victims of natural disasters, that are at the same time, victims of the global imperialist capitalism that, with its pro-development policy, continues to provoke destruction, death and poverty transforming itself into the main aggressor against Mother Earth, destroyed today by the avarice of imperialist capitalism.

I would like to remember the recent victims of natural disasters that have been stimulated by the deprivation provoked by global capitalism... the victims of Hurricane Katrina, the victims of the earthquake in Peru, the victims of the floods in Africa; the indigenous victims, the Miskito and Mayangna people, the victims of Hurricane Felix in Central America, Latin America and the Caribbean, in the land of Sandino and Rubén Dario.

Our brothers and sisters, the Miskito and Mayangna people, who obtained their autonomy in 1987, and who today participate in a process where their rights are recognized under the Law of Autonomy, have asked me to recognize the United Nations, because after a battle of more than 20 years, they are finally beginning to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples.

They have asked me to deliver here in the United Nations, a document signed by the leaders of our brothers and sisters the Miskito, the Mayangnas, the people of African heritage, victims of Hurricane Felix, so that this document can circulate among all of you, brothers and sisters and representatives of the people of our planet.

Eighteen years ago I had the opportunity of addressing, in the period from 1979 to 1989, this General Assembly of the United Nations; and I remember the speeches perfectly, the messages, the positions. Eighteen years have passed, and thanks to the undefeatable fight of the people of Sandino, I am here again, addressing these words to you.

This morning, as the General Assembly began, I listened attentively the words of the second speaker, who took exactly twenty minutes, and I hope not to go over twenty minutes... and I cannot find any difference between the thought, the word, the action of those that were at the forefront of this imperialist power, and the speech I heard this morning.

The presidents of the United States change, and they can have the best of intentions, they may think that they are doing something good for humanity, but they cannot see that they are nothing else but instruments of another empire, of the many empires that have imposed themselves upon our planet.

But they forget the life of empires is ephemeral, that just as they come into being, just as they fill themselves with pride and prepotency, just as they begin to dictate as Gods, who is good and who is bad, just as they dictate how they deliver what they call assistance, which is nothing but the historic debts they have with our people, they are simply responding to the policies of empire.

So it is no surprise that we find ourselves, not only with the same discourse, but with the same circumstances of oppression, violence and terror that suffered by humanity, a humanity that is today under a greater threat than 18 years ago, when I had the opportunity of speaking here in the United Nations; today, under the tyranny of global imperialist capitalism.

And there is an International Economic Order, of course there is! But, who dictates this International Economic Order? A minority of dictators that impose their interests, what are not new! They were the ones who enslaved the African peoples, the ones that enslaved our indigenous ancestors. They were the ones who exterminated the indigenous peoples here in the United States. And then came the immigrants... Europe, very relaxedly... with what right! To steamroll these people and install themselves as owners of that which did not belong to them.

They robbed these people of their rights, their culture, their interests and they imposed the culture and the interests of the colonizers. Thus was born what is today presented as the most exemplary democracy in the world, though in reality it was the tyranny, the most gigantic dictatorship that has existed in history of humanity, the tyranny of the North American Empire.

And if there is any doubt, let's see how Mr. President spoke this morning... with a total disrespect towards Cuba! When he represents a system that has tried to assassinate the President

of Cuba, our dear brother Fidel Castro, whom we honor because he has shown extraordinary solidarity, he has been firm and truthful with his principles in his fight for humanity.

They, who have persisted in maintaining the brutal Cuban blockade, for reasons of national interest, do not pay attention to these “democratic principles”, when, for economic reasons, they weave common action with nations with which they have, supposedly, ideological differences. Capital unites them and thus do ideological differences disappear.

With what authority can they question the rights of Iran or North Korea? With what right do they question the right of these peoples to build peaceful atomic programs? And even more! If they want to use it for military purposes... with what authority, with what right, do those that have been the only one, the only state that in the history of humanity to use atomic bombs against defenseless people, like they did in Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

With what authority... can they condemn the people of Iran that is working for the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes? The fact is that they have already decided that it is not with peaceful purposes, and who has given them that right? They give it themselves and they impose it on the General Assembly!

Because this General Assembly is not more than a reflection of a world reality, where a capitalist, imperialist minority, that today imposes global capitalism and establishes an order to exploit, oppress, impoverish, enslave, to continue provoking Apartheid against the Latin American immigrants and against the African immigrants in Europe... because global capitalism is one and has a single head! But is only one, with its tentacles everywhere.

With what authority? It has been the country with the largest atomic arsenal on the planet and with what authority do other countries that possess atomic weapons come here to try to question the right of other nations to the peaceful development of atomic energy? They don't even have the moral authority to question the right of any people to develop atomic energy for peaceful purposes and even for military purposes.

This is not, of course, the best road for humanity... the best road would be for all atomic weapons to disappear! If the United States, if the American presidents, and I do not want to personalize in one president the conduct of the empire, because the empire is the empire! Independently of who is heads it, whether Democrat or Republican... the empire is the empire!

If the United States really wants to demonstrate that it is convinced that it is necessary to end the threat of atomic energy with military ends, it has to be the first to start a policy of nuclear disarmament! A policy that must be followed by all those that have nuclear armaments...

And then... there will be moral authority to say that no nation in the world can invest resources in atomic development for military purposes. And then all nations can have the option and the right that is being denied to those developing countries to opt for peaceful atomic development.

Eighteen years ago, I told you, from this very same place, we talked about the same problems!... The Palestinian problem, the Palestinian people, always bloodied, with a nation there that has atomic weapons! Right there, in the historic territory of the Palestinian people.

Eighteen years ago we talked about Puerto Rico, a nation that has been fighting for its independence, and here is Puerto Rico fighting for its independence; the United States continues expressing, quite clearly, its neocolonialist policies. In other words, they combine the most advanced forms of domination with the most retrograde forms of domination, like the military bases they have in Guantanamo.

Eighteen years ago we talked about armament and History remains the same! Eighteen years ago there we spoke of war and history remains the same today, even worse, because we find ourselves in a brutal war, imposed by imperialism, imposed by the economic and oil interests of the empire.

He thought it was going to be an easy task to occupy Afghanistan and Iraq, and has met the resistance of the people in those countries. An invasion started with a campaign of lies! Because it was not true that Iraq had any possibility of creating atomic weapons.

What can I conclude? That the enemy continues to be the same, after eighteen years! Now that I find myself again in the United Nations, the enemy is the same and is called global imperialist capitalism. And we alone, the people, can change this.

The people that have been able to achieve their liberation have not done so thanks to the good will of the empires, but thanks to struggle, to the spilled blood of the people. The people that spilled their blood in South Africa to attain independence... how many years of ignominy, of suffering, of slavery, of Apartheid in South Africa.

We could thus go through the whole African continent and find that people acquired freedom, in spite of the fact that the modern colonialists tried to maintain those forms of occupation and of course assumed new forms of occupation and established new forms of domination.

It is our peoples that have to continue battling, it is the unity of our people, of the Latin America, of Central America, of the Caribbean, unity at ALBA. And do not let actions be repeated, like their actions against Venezuela when, against a democratically elected president, they tried a military coup! They tried to repeat the history of Salvador Allende, the history of Chile, they tried to repeat it.

But it wasn't the United Nations, the United Nations was not called to say, what is happening in Venezuela is a barbarity! What is happening must be condemned, because it is a democratically elected government. No! Rather the empire ran immediately to recognize the coup leaders!... It was the Venezuelan people themselves that rose to reinstate the president they had elected. In other words it is the people that decide their own destiny!

For that reason, so that the United Nations can change, my brothers and sisters... we may all be filled with good intentions. I don't even doubt the representatives of global capitalism and

imperialists come here with the best of intentions, some of them; but they lose sight, they continue their dependency-creating proposals, because they are “help-ists”! When they talk of help, they are insulting us!

They have to understand, once and for all, that as they have been able to profit from privatization... what do the huge transnational enterprises come to do in the developing countries? They say they come to help, but what businessman comes to help? The businessman invests to make money, to maximize its profits, not to reinvest them in the country but to take them away, because the developing countries are classified as insecure countries. In other ways we are being sacked!

If we compare the volume of riches that the capitalist, developed countries, with their huge enterprises and their immense globalized capital, continue to extract from our countries, if we compare those riches, those profits, with what the Latin American migrants send from the United States to their families, or what the immigrants from Africa and Asian in Europe, it is really a miserly amount! Compared with the volumes of riches sacked daily by those institutionalized forms of oppression.

On the other hand, the immigrants that work in the United States and Europe, work harder than anybody! They do the jobs that the Americans and Europeans do not do and receive miserable salaries... then, who is doing a favor for whom?

They do no favor for the Latin Americans that are able to work in the United States and who are able to save a few dollars to send one hundred, two hundred dollars to their families, as opposed to the sacking of the big enterprises that come to obtain huge profits, but also to profit from cheap labor and the conditions imposed by the Free Trade Agreements.

Logically, free enterprise so that human beings confront each other, so that societies confront each other, nations, let's see who is the strongest! And of course the strongest will prevail, the law of the jungle, free enterprise.

What we need in the world is fair commerce, what the world demands is really a change in the globalized capitalist imperialist countries, there has to be a change in them! They have to change the concepts of free markets and free trade agreements for just commerce and a just international market.

It is not by reducing subsidies that this problem will be resolved, because quite simply, the disparities are so great that it is impossible! It is not with crumbs that this problem will be resolved.

These problems will be resolved with profoundly radical changes that will democratize those that, although they are a minority on Planet Earth, are the owners of the riches, are the owners of atomic armaments, and impose their policies on this Assembly. They step over the Security Council of the United Nations; they impose their own laws over those that are clearly established and they have no respect for humanity.

Only by changing these policies in these countries, these nations, these people, is it possible to have the just world we all talk about. Because we all talk about a just world, a world at peace, a world of fraternity, of solidarity, ah! But from words to practice, there is a great distance!

Receive my dear brothers and sisters our salutations, the salutations of the Nicaraguan people, a fighting people that has suffered the interventions of the empire, since 1856! Before the triumph of the October Revolution, that revolution of the great Lenin. When there was no East-West conflict, Nicaragua was already suffering the expansionist policies of the empire, Nicaragua already had to rise up in arms to confront those that wanted to defeat us and impose on us Yankee presidents.

We want, dear brothers and sisters, to ask you to transmit to your peoples the conviction that today more than ever, there are also conditions for the unity of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples; the unity of the African peoples is growing, the unity of the Asian peoples must grow, free of this global capitalism! Because what good is it to talk about Socialism if what is being built is capitalism and if what happening is a holy alliance with global and imperialist capitalism.

We have to build the Grand Unity, in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America, where we are walking with the same strength, the same energy, the same principles that live on of Lubumba, Sekú Turé. The principles of the Asian fighters, of immortal Ho Chi Minh; the principles of Latin American fighters, the principles of the same North American fighters, of the United States of America, the principles of the European fighters.

The principles of Latin America, of Bolivar, Martí, Sandino, Tupac Katari, Tupac Amaru, those principles live on and will continue to be of value as long as these forms of oppression exist!

I have faith in God, and the certainty that just as the peoples, in spite of so much oppression, of so much destruction, have not surrendered, nor have sold out... today more than ever, the people lift themselves with pride, firmness, dignity, they will not sell out nor will they surrender to the globalized capitalist empire!

Thank you.

Socialist Voice #211, October 22, 2007

The CAW and Magna: Disorganizing the Working Class

by **Sam Gindin**

The Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW) leadership has hailed its October 15 agreement with auto parts maker Magna International as providing a new “framework of fairness” that may, over time, bring 18,000 Magna workers into the union. In this article, Sam Gindin explains the agreement’s negative features, including abolition of the right to strike and to elect shop stewards.

Sam was CAW research director and chief economist until his retirement in 2000; he now teaches political economy at York University. Sam’s article is reprinted with permission from The Bullet, an e-bulletin published by Socialist Project.

“In the neoconservative Canada of the late 1990s, the labour movement needs to become more militant, less accommodating to the demands of corporations and governments. If this sounds like a return to the days of the 1930s or 1950s, so be it. It’s either that or watch decades of hard-won gains disappear. This resistance will mean arrests, charges, maybe even jail terms for some of our leaders and members. But if we are to check this massive wave of unfairness, we simply have no alternative.”

— *Buzz Hargrove, Labour of Love (1998), pp. 88-9.*

Through the 1980s and 1990s, as the attacks on past working class gains intensified, the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW) was widely recognized – not just in North America but abroad – as standing at the forefront of working class resistance. With the Magna-CAW Agreement signed on October 15, 2007, the CAW now seems at the forefront of working class desperation and defeat.

This startling agreement raises three sets of questions.

1. What is in it for Magna?
2. What did the CAW get out of this (other than dues)?
3. What are the implications for the labour movement as a whole?

Before getting to these questions, it is useful to return to the foundations of independent unionism (still taught in CAW educationals) and consider how they relate to the ‘Magna Model’ the CAW has turned to.

What are unions as independent organizations?

The contradiction that has always faced working people is that they are dependent on their employers for work, yet need to create a degree of independence so they can address their own, distinct needs. The foundation for that independence was a democratic organization of workers –

a ‘union.’ It resonated with workers because it was truly ‘theirs’; it was a space within which the employer had no say. In practice the innovation of shop stewards, workers elected from various sections of the workplace, was crucial. The stewards represented workers in their daily struggles with management and also acted as mentors and leaders in the development of a culture of solidarity. Against the god of profits and the devil of competitiveness, workers and their unions developed their own understanding of the world and formulated distinct working class values. But all this would come to naught if workers didn’t also have an independent basis of power to offset, if not match the power of the employer. That power rested on the right to withdraw their labour – a basic democratic right that was only reluctantly recognized, and even then limited, by governments and employers. Pierre Trudeau summarized this well in his early years, before he entered formal politics:

‘In the present state of society, in fact, it is the possibility of the strike which enables workers to negotiate with their employers on terms of approximate equality..... [Without it] the trade union movement becomes nothing more than one institution among many in the service of capitalism: a convenient organization for disciplining the workers, occupying their leisure time, and ensuring their profitability for business’. – The Asbestos Strike (1956).

What’s in it for Magna?

Magna has been able to limit the CAW to only three of its 45 units and faces no major organizing drives today. Why then has it suddenly opened the door to the CAW (even if it’s on Magna’s own terms)? Bringing the union in, even on the company’s terms, does mean new administrative headaches (at a minimum, more meetings and consultations take time) and possible hazards for Magna (things are stable now; why risk something blowing up in your face). Other companies, even if they could get the CAW deal, would likely reject it unless the point was to co-opt an actual organizing drive. In fact, it’s no secret that even most of Magna’s top management is not all that enamoured with this new step.

The new relationship to the CAW starts and ends with Frank Stronach. Frank Stronach, Magna’s founder and current top officer, has always had a paternalistic vision of workplace relations. Fairness is good as long as he gets to define it. Unions are okay if they are certain kinds of unions. The CAW, which left the American international union in the mid-1980s over how close its leadership had gotten to the companies and how far they had gotten from the membership, was certainly not a potential partner for Stronach. Nor was the Buzz Hargrove of the years following that separation, Stronach’s ideal labour leader. But over the past few years Stronach had clearly decided that the new CAW – made desperate by a loss of jobs and with a president vain enough to declare victory no matter the scale of the concessions – does get his stamp of approval. And so Stronach moved ahead to, as he says, ‘transform North American labour relations.’

In the Magna model, these foundations for independent unionism are, to all intents and purposes erased. It is true and important that the company has agreed to open the door to the union contacting its workers. But that comes at the cost of the kind of union the workers can then have.

- The right to strike is fully erased; it is gone *forever*. As the CAW press kit puts it: ‘There will be no strikes or lockouts under this *system*’ (emphasis added). When the agreement ends, if the members reject the new offer, it goes to arbitration. Period. (The kit goes on to suggest that the strike weapon is, in any case, not really that important.)
- Shop stewards do not exist. The CAW has accepted this. Stewards are replaced by a ‘fairness committee’ staffed by equal numbers of labour and management reps (who are part of the ‘concern resolution process’). The key union rep under this structure is the ‘Employee Advocate’, a carryover from Magna’s traditional practice who seems to be the formal equivalent of a plant chairperson. According to the *Toronto Star* (October 16, 2007), the Employee Advocate is not elected from the membership at large but screened by a committee which included both labour representatives and *management*(!). To date it is not public information how the final selection is made. This system is reminiscent in some ways to the ‘controlled democracy’ in communist Europe a while back, where managers – in that case as union members – prepared lists from which the leaders could be chosen.
- The Magna units will be part of one Canada-wide – effectively Ontario-wide – amalgamated local. (This in itself may tend to isolate each unit from interaction with other units in the community). The above Employee Advocates will make up the executive of that local and constitute, along with representatives from the national union, the bargaining committee. The local officers – for example, the President and Secretary-Treasurer – will be chosen by this executive rather than, as in current CAW practice, via a vote of the membership.
- As for ideology, the CAW president has proudly declared his enthusiasm for a ‘non-adversarial’ relationship, repeating (without embarrassment) all the mushy clichés about ‘teamwork’ and ‘being in this together’ that he not so long ago scorned for their rank hypocrisy. This, it is important to emphasize, is not just about rhetoric. The attitude to labour-management relations is one of the criteria that will be used in evaluating acceptability for being the Employee Advocate. Trouble-makers – those who challenge the system, ‘stir up trouble’ and have always been the backbone of independent unionism – need not apply.

Magna workers, it is clear, need a union. There are, for example, questions of internal wage parity, equity across jobs, and contract workers. And Magna has often undercut other Canadian producers in overall wages, benefits and working conditions. Magna argues that it sets its wages at the average manufacturing wage for the particular work, that its raises follow that average, and that it has no intention of changing this practice. Given that Magna the largest employer in the industry – larger even than General Motors – and in the face of its’ profitability and provision of

outrageous compensation to its executives (Stronach's earnings over the past three years have totalled over \$100 million), it would seem that the union is positioned to demand that Magna should actually *lead* in setting higher standards.

But given the constraints on the union of the Magna model, above all with the possibility of a strike not on the table, it's questionable how much collective bargaining will accomplish. As well, the union has already agreed to set aside its own practice of establishing defined benefit pension plans at major employers and accept Magna's alternative of a savings and profit-sharing plan. As for workplace itself, Magna is steadfast on its absolute control in running the plant; with the union agreeing to ensure the company's competitiveness, it is not simply credible to suggest that the union will introduce any significant challenge to the company on working conditions.

Why did the CAW do this?

The union might be defended on two grounds. The first is that the union is engaging in a scam: once it has a foothold it will revert to traditional unionism. But suggestions that this is the hidden agenda do not stand up. In the 1980s, when the CAW was at its peak in terms of confidence, it might have been argued that such an experiment would draw Magna workers into the CAW orbit. Today, when the CAW has itself been drifting more and more towards corporatist partnerships with the Detroit Big Three, other CAW locals are likely to be drawn into the orbit of the type of trade unionism this deal with Frank Stronach represents.

In any case, it is difficult enough to build a union presence in the best of circumstances; it is virtually impossible when, as in the Magna model, the ideological framework and internal structures all work against you. As well, the path to the full unionization agreed to here is spread over a 9-10 year period in which the CAW gets access to about five plants yearly. This implies a self-disciplining incentive: if the union wants all the plants, it will have to behave – and get the members to behave in the initial plants where the union is recognized – in a way that doesn't disrupt the agreement before all the units are in the CAW. And by the time all the plants are in the union, a decade or so from now at best, a culture will have been established that will not be easily changed.

In fact, the more likely scenario for the development of a 'real' union might come from the outside. Frustrated with a union that draws dues but acts like the industrial relations arm of the company, workers might rebel and look to another union to come in, this time to join workers ready to challenge the status quo. It should however be noted that this leads to murky legal territory. Since the units will be under one collective agreement, the Labour Board might rule that they must all stay or go together and can't be picked off one at a time – making a change in unions difficult if not impossible (as was seen in the failed attempt at organizing the banks in the 1980s).

A more traditional defence of this new CAW policy would be that the unionization of Magna is critical to the rest of the parts industry and the auto industry more generally, but the only way to accomplish this is by way of a tactical retreat from principle. The problem addressed in this

argument is serious. There is no question that unionization in today's climate of overwhelming restructuring is extremely difficult and this is all the truer at Magna where keeping unions out has been one of its major investments.

The main point of course is that raised earlier: it doesn't make much sense to kill the patient to cure the disease; the union is better off without Magna than with getting Magna but giving up what the union stands for. But that's not all. A number of other hard questions are relevant here.

- Before the Harris revolution and even under Conservative administrations, Ontario had labour laws and regulations which, though the union movement never thought they went far enough, allowed for a meaningful right to organize. With the victory of McGuinty, there was an opportunity to reverse what Harris imposed. Why did the CAW not join the labour movement to mount and sustain through the election the kind of campaign that might have given us a better alternative than 'collective begging'? Why, instead, did the President of the CAW endorse the Liberals without any commitment on such changes (and do so, incidentally, without a mandate from his members)?
- The CAW has in the past insisted that part of its relationship to the Big Three include a corporate rule of conduct that calls on parts suppliers to show 'neutrality' in workers' decisions on whether or not to join a union. (This was, in fact, an element in the CAW's victory at Magna's Integram unit in Windsor.) Why is this now not getting the same or more emphasis?
- Any serious campaign to bring Magna into the fold would indeed cost a small fortune. The CAW is financially strong and the issue is a matter of priorities. The CAW has, for example, found the resources to provide \$5 million in financial support for what some consider a shady break-away local of the Labourer's International when this could have gone into an organizing drive. More important, can the CAW continue to realistically rely on its full-time staff to organize modestly-paid workers? Would it not be more sensible (and less of a strain on resources) to combine experienced full-time staff with dozens of young, energetic workers – paid at their existing wage rate and drawn from CAW workplaces across the country – to organize within their communities?
- It has to be recognized that unionization is not just about what the organizing department does; it's also about the drive and vision within the union as a whole. How far can unions go in attracting new members if they demand dues but sound like management? If there is no larger vision of building the working class through unionization, what reason is there to expect members and staff to make the material commitments and sacrifices to do what is necessary
- In the face of the increased corporate aggressiveness, competition between unions over whose institution will expand is can be especially destructive. Where the goal is a major organizing breakthrough, how can some degree of cooperation among unions be

established? Can this happen without unions coming to identify the main goal as being to build the working class as a whole?

What are the larger implications for the CAW as a whole and for other unions?

The importance of the unionization of Magna was always seen in the CAW as of value in itself but also as being about the protection of standards in the rest of the auto parts sector. But now it is almost inevitable that in any new bargaining, companies will demand the same structures as Magna. If not a permanent no-strike ban, then at least six-year Agreements during which strikes are banned. If getting rid of stewards is not on, maybe having fewer stewards will be accepted.

This may have implications outside the parts sector. In response to a question at the press conference announcing the deal, Hargrove bizarrely commented (*Globe and Mail*, October 15, 2007) that he would 'make a similar arrangement available to General Motors or other auto makers that wanted to build a new greenfield plant in Canada' (meaning an entirely new plant, not an addition). GM workers, fully aware that a more modern plant with radically lower standards will over time erode their existing standards if not their jobs, might be surprised to hear this.

The CAW's abandonment of the right to strike at Magna has enormous implications in terms of the labour movement's struggles (including in the CAW) to win this democratic right. And it mindlessly undermines those workers who never had this right or have seen it eroded as governments expanded the scope of 'essential services', or introduced back to work legislation. If it is the case that, as the CAW press kit claims, 30,000 CAW members don't have the right to strike, is this not of concern to the union? (Ironically, the first section on the CAW web page has a runner giving the latest 'News Flash'; included here is the formation of a cross union alliance, including the CAW, to resist the Nova Scotia government's threat to bring in legislation curtailing the right to strike for health care workers).

Hargrove has already declared that if other companies offer something similar to the Magna model, the union will jump at the chance ('Invite us in', Hargrove says, *Toronto Star*, October 16, 2007). But other union leaders, some who were not as outspoken as Hargrove in the confrontation with the Rae government's imposition of conditions on workers, have reacted negatively. Wayne Samuelson, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour, warned of the precedent being set. And Wayne Fraser, Ontario-Atlantic director of the United Steelworkers rightfully asked: 'What's to stop other employers, especially Magna competitors, from rightfully asking the CAW for the same no-strike right?' (*Toronto Star*, October 16, 2007).

Where in all this are the militants of the CAW – the activists, staff and local and national leaders who not long ago so clearly understood that they couldn't 'watch decades of hard-won gains disappear'? Where is their outrage?

Socialist Voice #212, October 24, 2007

Review: *Build it Now: Socialism for the Twenty-First Century*

Michael A. Lebowitz. *Build it Now: Socialism for the Twenty-First Century*. Monthly Review Press. 127 pages

Reviewed by Paul Kellogg

One of the political highlights of summer, 2007 in Toronto, was the visit to the city by author Michael Lebowitz. His packed out talk introduced a Toronto audience not just to recent developments in the revolutionary process underway in Venezuela, but to the rethinking of socialism accompanying that process. For those who missed his talk, Monthly Review has done us the favour of putting out an inexpensive paperback with some of Lebowitz' writings on the subject.

Begin not with Venezuela, but with socialism. For more than two generations, socialist activists have had a problem. The two great models of socialism on offer – Russia's state-ownership combined with political totalitarianism, and the West's social democracy, which accepted parliamentary democracy, but was only too willing to compromise with capitalism – these two models had left millions disillusioned.

Lebowitz frames his whole argument in a rejection of those polarities.

“Socialism ... could never be delivered to people from above. It is the work of the working class itself, Marx argued. ... Only by rejecting hierarchy and converting the state ‘from an organ standing above society into one completely subordinate to it’ could the state be that of ‘the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organized force of their suppression.’ Only that ‘self-government of the producers’ could be the form of state by which people emancipate themselves and create the basis for a socialist society.”

Simply for the restatement of this profoundly radical vision of socialism from below, this book would be worth the purchase.

But Lebowitz' point is not to simply reclaim socialism in the abstract. He points to the concrete struggles unfolding in Venezuela as offering at least the possibility of operationalizing this stirring vision.

In this, while respecting the role of president Hugo Chávez, he does not see him as the chief actor. In fact, Lebowitz argues, after the failed coup attempt against him in April 2002.

“[T]he crushing of the April coup did not put the sword in the hand of the Bolivarian Revolution. On the contrary, Chávez – uncertain of how deep his support was, especially within the military – proceeded very cautiously. ... Capital retained all its positions of power.”

The key event, according to Lebowitz, was the mass response to the bosses' strike which followed the coup. There were "months of daily struggle, and this battle was won by the masses, who were prepared to struggle to support what they saw as their government and who transformed themselves in the course of transforming circumstances.

"The slaveholders' revolt had put the sword in the hands of the masses. And, this time the government responded without any efforts at conciliation."

It is after this assertion of the power of the masses, that Chávez began taking money from the oil companies in a big way, and ploughed it back into education and health, "the basic prerequisites of human development" in Lebowitz's words.

"Barrio Adentro, the program bringing Cuban doctors into the poorest neighbourhoods, began in April 2003 ... Mission Robinson, the basic literacy program, began in July ... And mission Mercal, building upon the government distribution of food during the general lockout, was established in early 2004, bringing significantly subsidized food to the poor."

Lebowitz documents how this process radicalized the thinking of Chávez.

" 'We have to reinvent socialism,' Chávez declared in his closing speech at the 2005 World social Forum ... 'It can't be the kind of socialism that we saw in the Soviet Union, but it will emerge as we develop new systems that are built on cooperation, not competition. ... [W]e cannot resort to state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the Soviet Union.'"

This thinking, Lebowitz argues, "was a logical continuation of a path that began with the rejection of imperialism, neoliberalism, and the logic of capital."

Buy this book. There are, of course, some things that require further discussion.

Lebowitz, for instance, believes that the Caracazo, the great uprising in 1989 "ultimately signified very little." It is not clear why he says this as later he argues that one of the lasting effects of this rebellion "was the military revolt of 1992 that its brutal suppression stimulated."

This is not a quibble. The great strength of Lebowitz' book is the way it puts the action of the masses at the centre of politics. To not give adequate weight to the accomplishments of one of these mass actions, is a worry.

More generally, we need an ounce of caution to attach to the wonderful renovation of socialism coming out of Venezuela.

Venezuela is a terribly poor country. The barriers it faces between an economy crushed by imperialism and a "society of associated producers where each individual is able to develop his full potential" – these barriers are staggering.

We need to support Venezuela in its assertion of sovereignty and independence from imperialism whether or not the masses of that country are able to make a breakthrough towards socialism.

Lenin, Trotsky and the Russian socialists, 90 years ago, knew that in their very poor country they could begin a socialist transformation. But they also knew, and were proven tragically correct, that without solidarity – and revolution – in the rich countries, their socialist breakthrough could not last.

Canada is one of the rich countries. We need to build now the political traditions capable of forging the solidarity that revolutionary movements in the Global South will require.

Lebowitz has offered us a very useful weapon in that struggle.

Buy it now.

A shorter version of this review was published in Socialist Worker (Canada)

Socialist Voice #213, October 24, 2007

Review: *Haiti, From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*

Randall Robinson. *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*. Basic Civitas. 280 pages.

Reviewed by Roger Annis

Randall Robinson has written the story of a great tragedy of recent times—the violent overthrow of Haiti’s elected president and government on February 29, 2004. *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President* gives a blow by blow account of the events surrounding that tragedy.

The author brings impressive credentials to the task. He helped to found the Trans Africa Forum, one of the most established human rights and social justice advocacy organizations in the U.S., dedicated to improving the lot of people of African descent. The Forum has long fought for a fair and respectful U.S. economic and political relationship with Haiti. His work gave him an enduring respect for the ousted president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and his wife Mildred.

Robinson writes with an unapologetic passion for the Haitian people’s historic fight against slavery and colonialism. He situates the tragic events of 2004 on the broader canvas of the racism and imperial arrogance that has dominated the policies of the world’s big powers towards Haiti, particularly those of the U.S. and France.

Why is Haiti so poor, the uninformed observer will ask. Surely, after 200 years of nominal independence the country could do better?

“As punishment for creating the first free republic in the Americas (when thirteen percent of the people living in the United States were slaves),” Robinson replies, “The new Republic of Haiti was met with a global economic embargo imposed by the United States and Europe.”

“The Haitian economy has never recovered from the havoc France (and America) wreaked upon it, during and after slavery.”

Robinson is not trying to write a comprehensive history of Haiti. (Paul Farmer’s *The Uses of Haiti* fits that bill admirably.) He does, however, provide enough historical background to explain the present-day.

The author rushes the reader back and forth in time and place in an effort to recreate the drama and tragedy of February 2004. “It was Friday, February 27, 2004,” he opens one chapter, “the evening before the last day of Haitian democracy.”

The stage for the overthrow of February 29, 2004 was set in the national election in the year 2000. Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president for a second time. The U.S., France and Canada, the three contemporary overseers of Haiti, threw up their hands in exasperation over the

electorate's choice of a man and a political movement dedicated to lifting the burden of their crushing poverty.

Aristide promised improvements to the lot of the desperately poor Haitian majority, and he was a man of his word. The big powers would have none of it. They began an embargo of aid funds to the government, directing funds instead to parallel services operated by "non-governmental" or charitable organizations. Soon they would also block the government's requests to international financial institutions for loans to finance ambitious education and health care projects

More ominously, money and arms flowed to paramilitary forces sponsored by the venal Haitian elite and drawn from the disbanded Haitian army or purged Haitian National Police. The paramilitaries were safely lodged in the neighbouring Dominican Republic. Robinson captures the gravity and drama of the periodic assaults they launched against the institutions of the Haitian government following the 2000 election.

When the paramilitaries launched what became a final incursion in early 2004, they were a small force, no more than 200. They were feared and hated by the majority of the Haitian people. By virtue of an overwhelming superiority of arms, they were able to wreck government rule in cities in the north of the country. But they didn't have a chance of taking the capital city. That task fell to their international sponsors, and this was done on February 28-29. The U.S., France, Canada and Chile landed troops at strategic locations in the country.

The Aristides were taken by U.S military forces to one of the most isolated countries in the world, the Central African Republic. *An Unbroken Agony* kicks into high gear as the author tells the story of the delegation he led on a harrowing flight to the Central African Republic on March 14 to rescue them from a quasi-imprisonment. The delegation included U.S. congresswoman Maxine Walters. It had no idea of the reception it would receive from the country's ruler, François Bozize, a client of French imperialism. After many tense hours, Bozize gave permission to the delegation to leave, its mission accomplished. The Aristides were granted political exile in South Africa, where they remain to this day.

One of the myths perpetrated by supporters of the foreign intervention in Haiti is that Jean-Bertrand Aristide was prepared to leave the presidency and the country in the face of the mounting political pressure against him. The Aristides accepted a U.S. offer to whisk them out of the country, so the story goes. Robinson presents extensive documentation to dispel the myth.

An Unbroken Agony prompted many questions in the mind of this reader. How did the paramilitaries achieve such a devastating impact? The Haitians who overthrew Haitian democracy in February 2004 were a tiny force—their principal leader, Guy Philippe, received less than two percent of the vote in the 2006 presidential election. Were there more decisive steps that the Aristide government could have taken to defend the country and minimize the havoc they caused following the 200 election?

And what has become of Latin American solidarity? Robinson describes the selfless measures of the early 19th century Haitian revolutionaries to aid the independence struggle of the South

American peoples led by Simón Bolívar. Today, the majority of the 7,100 foot soldiers of the post-2004 UN-sponsored occupation force in Haiti are drawn from the countries of Latin America, with Brazil — whose president is the leader of the governing “Workers Party” — in the lead. The UN force is responsible for innumerable killings and jailings of pro-democracy fighters following February 2004. Thankfully, substantial aid and solidarity to Haiti from Venezuela and Cuba keeps the banner of Simón Bolívar flying high in Haiti.

Haiti is living an unprecedented economic and social calamity as a consequence of the coup d’etat of 2004. The violent overthrow of its government received little attention or concern from democratic opinion in the world. A shameful silence still reigns.

Roger Annis travelled to Haiti from August 5 to 20 as a participant in a human rights investigative delegation.

Socialist Voice #214, October 24, 2007

Declaration of Indigenous Congress in Bolivia

“The struggle is unceasing, we will continue our resistance until our time comes!”

A Formal Summons to World States by Indigenous First Nations and Peoples

Declaration of the World Encounter ‘For the Historic Victory of the Indigenous Peoples of the World’

Chimoré, Cochabamba, Bolivia,

October 12, 2007

From the heart of South America, on this 12th day of October, 2007, the delegates of the indigenous first nations and peoples of the world, meeting in the World Encounter “For the Historic Victory of the Indigenous Peoples of the World,” to celebrate the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, hereby declare:

That, after 515 years of oppression and domination, here we stand; they have been unable to eliminate us. We have confronted and resisted the policies of ethnocide, genocide, colonization, destruction and plunder. The imposition of such economic systems as capitalism, characterized by interventionism, wars and socio-environmental disasters, a system that continues to threaten our ways of life as peoples.

That as a consequence of the neoliberal policy of domination of nature, the search for easy profits from the concentration of capital in a few hands and the irrational exploitation of natural resources, our Mother Earth is fatally injured, while the indigenous peoples are still being displaced from our territories. The planet is warming up. We are experiencing an unprecedented change in climate with ever-stronger and more frequent socio-environmental disasters, affecting all of us without exception.

That we are trapped in a great energy crisis, with the Age of Petroleum coming to an end, and without having found a clean alternative energy that can substitute for it in the necessary quantities to maintain that Western civilization that has made us totally dependent on hydrocarbons.

That this situation may be a threat that will leave us exposed to the danger that neoliberal and imperialist policies trigger wars for the last drops of the so-called black gold and blue gold, but may also give us the opportunity to make this new millennium a millennium of life, a millennium of balance and complementarity, without having to take advantage of energies that destroy Mother Earth.

That both the natural resources and the lands and territories we inhabit are ours for history, for birth, in law and for ever, and that the power to determine their use is fundamental to our ability to maintain our life, sciences, learning, spirituality, organization, medicines and food sovereignty.

That a new era is beginning, promoted by the original indigenous peoples, and bringing again times of change, times of Pachakuti,[1] in the times of the culmination of the Quinto Sol.[2]

That we welcome the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is essential for the survival and well-being of the more than 370 million native peoples in some 70 countries of the world. After more than 20 years of struggle, it is responsive to our historical demand for self-determination of the peoples and recognition of ourselves and our collective rights.

The adopted declaration contains a set of principles and norms that recognize and establish in the international regulatory system the fundamental rights of the Indigenous Peoples, those that must be the basis of the new relationship between the Indigenous Peoples, states, societies and cooperation throughout the world. In addition, therefore, to the other existing juridical instruments governing human rights, the declaration is the new regulatory and practical basis for guaranteeing and protecting indigenous rights in various spheres and at various levels.

We call on the member countries of the United Nations and encourage the indigenous peoples to implement and comply with this important instrument of historical significance. We censure those governments that have voted in opposition to the Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples, and condemn their double standards.

That we pledge to support the historic effort being led by our brother Evo Morales, President of the Indigenous Peoples of Abya Yala,[3] in the construction of a new plurinational State. We will be vigilant in the face of any threat, internal or external, to the process in Bolivia and we call on the peoples of the planet to lend their support and solidarity to this process, which ought to serve as an example so that the Peoples, Nations and States of the world continue along this path.

Accordingly, the Indigenous Peoples and Nations of the world demand that the States fulfill the following mandates:

1. To construct a world based on the Culture of Life, in the identity, philosophy, world view and age-old spirituality of the original indigenous peoples, applying the aboriginal knowledge and skills, strengthening the processes of interchange and brotherhood among the nations and respecting self-determination.
2. To make national and international decisions to save Mother Nature from the disasters that are being brought about by capitalism in its decline, as manifested in global warming and the ecological crisis; reaffirming that the original indigenous culture is the only alternative means of saving our planet earth.
3. To replace the present models of development based on capitalism, commodities, the irrational exploitation of humanity and natural resources, the squandering of energy, and consumerism, with models that establish life, complementarity, reciprocity, respect for cultural diversity and the sustainable use of natural resources as the principal priorities.

4. To implement national policies governing food sovereignty as a principal basis of national sovereignty, in which the community guarantees respect for its own culture as appropriate spaces and modes of production, distribution and consumption consistent with the nature of healthy pollutant-free foods for the entire population, eliminating hunger, because food is a right to life.
5. To repudiate schemes and projects for the generation of energy such as biofuel, which destroy and deny food to the peoples. Likewise, we condemn the use of transgenic seeds because it replaces our ancient seeding process and makes us dependent on agro-industry.
6. To recognize and re-evaluate the role of the original indigenous woman as the vanguard of the emancipatory struggles of our peoples in accordance with the principles of duality, equality and equity of relationships between men and women.
7. To adopt the culture of peace and life as a guide for resolving the world's problems and conflicts, renouncing the arms race, and to initiate disarmament in order to guarantee the preservation of life on this planet.
8. To adopt the just legal transformations that are necessary for the construction of systems and means of communication and information based on our world view, spirituality and communal philosophy, in the wisdom of our ancestors. To guarantee recognition of the indigenous peoples' right to communication and information.
9. To guarantee respect for and the right to life, health and bilingual intercultural education, incorporating policies of benefit to the indigenous first nations and peoples.
10. To declare water to be a human right, a vital element and social property of humanity and not a source of profit. Likewise, to encourage the use of alternative energies that do not threaten the life of the planet, thereby guaranteeing access to all basic services.
11. To solve cases of migration between countries in a mutually responsible way, adopting policies of free circulation of persons in order to guarantee a world without borders in which there is no discrimination, marginalization and exclusion.
12. To decolonize the United Nations, and move its headquarters to a territory that dignifies and expresses the just aspirations of the peoples, nations and states of the world.
13. Not to criminalize the struggles of the indigenous peoples, or demonize or accuse us of terrorism when we reclaim our rights and advance our ideas on how to save life and humanity.
14. To release immediately the indigenous leaders imprisoned in various parts of the world, and in the first place Leonard Peltier in the United States.

The struggle is unceasing, we will continue our resistance until our time comes. We proclaim the 12th of October the "day of commencement of our struggles to save Mother Nature". From our families, homes, communities, peoples, whether in government or without, we ourselves are

determining and directing our destinies, we ourselves are assuming the will and responsibility to live well that has been bequeathed to us by our ancestors, to expand, from the simplest and least complicated to the greatest and most complex, to construct horizontally and mutually, each and every one, the culture of patience, the culture of dialogue and fundamentally the culture of life.

By the dead, the heroes and martyrs that lend meaning to our lives through their utopias and longings, we strengthen our identity, our organizational processes and our struggles to build the unity of the peoples of the world and to restore the balance, saving life, humanity and the planet earth.

We confirm our support for the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to brother Evo Morales for his ongoing and unconditional dedication to the good of humanity, the peoples, the planet and world peace.

Footnotes

[1] “*Pachakuti* is a Quechua word with multiple meanings. Literally meaning turning or returning (*kuti*) of the earth (*pacha*), it is translated alternatively as ‘new beginning,’ ‘reawakening,’ ‘revolution,’ or ‘renovation.’ ... It has replaced Tupaj Katari as the key symbol of indigenous resistance in the Andes, as demonstrated by its use in indigenous political parties’ names in Ecuador (Movimiento Unido Pluricultural Pachakutik) and Peru (Partido Inka Pachacúteq), as well as Felipe Quispe’s Movimiento Indígena Pachakutik. Pachakuti is also the name of a prominent 15th-century Inca leader who ruled during a time of territorial expansion (personal communication, José Antonio Lucero, 4 Dec. 2002).” – Donna Lee Van Cott, “From Exclusion to Inclusion: Bolivia’s 2002 Elections”, *J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 35, 751–775, p. 764n.

[2] Literally, the Fifth Sun. See http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/mysfifthsun.html.

[3] “Continent of Life”. See <http://abyayala.nativeweb.org/about.html>.

Translated from *America Latina en Movimiento* for *Bolivia Rising* by Richard Fidler. Footnotes added by the translator.

Socialist Voice #215, October 24, 2007

Support the Indigenous Struggle in Peru; A Letter from Hugo Blanco

Support the Indigenous Struggle in Peru

Canadian Solidarity Network Builds Aid and Solidarity for Hugo Blanco's Newspaper

In the 1960s, Hugo Blanco was the central leader of the “Land or Death!” struggle by indigenous peasants in the Cuzco region of Peru. When he was captured by the military dictatorship, a worldwide defense campaign first saved his life, then won his freedom from prison.

Hugo Blanco needs our help again today. His newspaper *Lucha Indígena* (Indigenous Struggle) is a vital voice for indigenous and other rural farmers in the Andes region of South Abya Yala (America). It urgently needs financial support to enable more frequent publication and to expand distribution.

The *Lucha Indígena* Solidarity Network has been formed to raise money and other material support for the newspaper, and to promote communication and collaboration between *Lucha Indígena* and First Nations Activists in the north.

The members of the initiating committee are: James Cockcroft (Montreal), Phil Stuart Cournoyer (Managua), Darrel Furlotte (Toronto), Urpi Pine (Toronto), Mike Krebs (Vancouver), Jacqueline Perez (Montreal), John Riddell (Toronto), Wayne Roberts (Toronto), and Nelson Rubio (St. Catharines)

Donations that may seem small by the standards of the global north can make a huge difference to this important project. Please contribute as generously as you can.

A Letter from Hugo Blanco

October 12, 2007 — Continental Day of 515 years of Indigenous and Black Struggle Against the European Conquest of Abya Yala

Dear sisters and brothers:

Private property in the means of production has been converted into private property in the means of destruction.

No need to mention the atomic bomb!

We see global warming, the hole in the ozone layer, the poisoning of river, lake, and sea waters, contaminated air in more and more cities, and the massacres during wars of invasion, etc. As long as private property in the means of destruction goes on the accelerated depredation of nature will also go on — relentlessly.

They tell us about globalization, but we see anti-globalization walls erected in North America and Palestine, as well as the invisible walls that impede more and more of us inhabitants of poor countries from getting into the rich countries.

The reason for this situation is that the huge multinational enterprises are leading “globalization” to serve their own interests to make more money in the least time possible. To do that, they are assaulting nature and drowning the rest of humanity in misery.

We stand for another kind of globalization, one led by humanity in its own interests, and in the interests of nature.

To that end, we are now globalizing our resistance. We are globalizing hope for a new world.

Native peoples of Abya Yala (the “Americas”) as a whole feel deeply wounded by the egoistic and individualist culture and the assault on nature imposed by the multinational firms – because our culture is rooted in solidarity and love for nature.

That’s why we are in the front line of resistance and struggle against this culture that is attacking all human kind and nature in general.

The Lucha Indígena Solidarity Network exemplifies this globalization of resistance and hope. Our editors are highly aware and moved by your solidarity, both moral and economic.

That solidarity commits us to keep you informed in a regular way with progress made in the work that you are supporting.

We pledge to do that, and we will.

With deep affection,

Hugo Blanco

Cusco, Peru

(Translated by Phil Stuart Cournoyer)

Socialist Voice #216, October 29, 2007

Employer Offensive Stalls as Australians Head to the Polls

By Roger Annis

Melbourne, Australia—Heading into Australia’s national election on November 24, Prime Minister John Howard is in trouble. Polls show that a majority of voters see the election as an opportunity to rid the country of his hated, right wing government. If it goes down to defeat, it will be in no small part thanks to determined struggles that working people have waged against it.

Howard is seeking a fourth term since coming to office in 1996. His Liberal Party governs in a coalition with the smaller National Party. He has ruled ruthlessly on behalf of Australia’s wealthy.

For most of the Howard years, Australia’s capitalists have been riding a resource-driven profit boom. The value of coal exports, for example, has risen from \$13 billion in 2001 to \$25 billion today. But these years have been marked by deep and sustained attacks on the rights and living conditions of working people. Wages have declined for many, especially young people. There have been sharp declines in social services, the environment, and democratic rights.

Military spending has increased sharply. The government is an enthusiastic ally of the U.S.-led “war on terrorism.” Australia has 4,000 troops abroad, including in Iraq and Afghanistan. It plays the leading role in United Nations-sponsored police operations in East Timor and Solomon Islands. New laws allow the government to trample on democratic rights in the name of “fighting terrorism.”

Disaster for Aboriginals

Howard’s term has been a disaster for Australia’s indigenous peoples. They number 470,000. Unemployment, at 20%, is three times the national average. Life expectancy is unchanged from 100 years ago—56 years for men and 63 for women, approximately 20 years less than the national average. Aboriginals make up 2.5% of the population, but 21% of the prison population. Only 39% of children finish high school.

Aboriginal lands are subject to constant desecration and destruction by massive resource extraction projects, the most recent of which is the proposed Hope Downs iron ore mine in the state of Western Australia.

Howard made a pre-election death bed conversion to indigenous rights on October 11 when he called for “reconciliation.” If re-elected, he would hold a referendum that would place a token clause in the Australian constitution recognizing the Aboriginal population. The measure would give no new rights or compensation to the victims of past racist policies. Compensation for the “Stolen Generations”—the victims of a policy of cultural genocide that saw police and social

welfare agencies workers remove children from their parents and communities—is a key demand of indigenous peoples.

Just three months before his conversion, Howard ordered an extraordinary police and military intervention into indigenous communities in the country's Northern Territory on the pretext of combating abuse of children and other social ills.

Workers' rights under attack

Trade union membership in Australia has declined during the Howard years from 31% of the workforce in 1996 to 20% today. Special laws restrict the rights of union representation and organizing. The most notorious of these are Australian Workplace Agreements (AWA). These allow employers to coerce workers into opting out of collective bargaining and signing individual "agreements" with their employers. They are especially effective in taking workers out of unions when they change jobs.

In early 2006, Howard's government adopted further draconian changes to labour law, called "Work Choices." Among its provisions are:

- Increased restrictions on the right to strike, including prohibiting non-union workers in an enterprise from joining industrial action by union colleagues.
- A new government commission better able to limit future increases to the minimum wage.
- Further entrenchment of youth slave labour wages. The federal minimum wage is \$13.74 (\$12.61US); employers can pay less than half that to youth or "trainees."
- Provisions that make it easier for employers of less than 100 employees to fire workers.
- More restrictions on the right of unions to recruit new members and bargain collective agreements.
- Provisions that further facilitate the imposition of AWAs.

The biggest attack on unions to date has been the Building Construction Industry Improvement Act, enacted in September 2005. It imposes sharp restrictions on union organizing and industrial action, and it imposes draconian penalties and gag restrictions on unions or workers who try to take action. Building industry police have special powers to ensure compliance with the act, including fining or jailing workers who do not cooperate with investigations.

A recent study of the first effects of Work Choices by the Workplace Research Center at Sydney University confirms that the program has led to a decline in wages and work conditions. The program is already widely unpopular, and it's a big reason why Howard's party trails the Labor Party opposition at the outset of the election. But the coalition government remains committed to its attacks on workers. Workplace Relations Minister Joe Hockey was asked by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on Oct 18 what future role he sees for trade unions in Australia. He said, "Well, essentially, it is over."

Outlook for Labor Party

The Australian Labor Party and its leader Kevin Rudd are riding high in polls at the outset of the election. Many workers and youth place high hopes in the party once installed in office.

Others are less than enthused. Rudd has said that his party will abolish AWAs, but not until the year 2012 at the earliest. It will keep other anti-union provisions of the Howard years. The Labor government in the state of Victoria is presently threatening 25,000 nurses there with fines, jailings and firings if they continue industrial action aimed at improving salaries and the quality of health care in the state. The nurses are also fighting to block the introduction of AWAs.

Labor Party Deputy Leader Julia Gillard explained the party's trade union policy on Oct 18 when she told journalists that "workers will only be able under our system to take protected industrial action when bargaining for an enterprise agreement followed by a mandatory secret ballot."

Industry-wide collective bargaining used to be common in Australia, as well as the right to strike during the life of a collective agreement. In 1983, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) signed a sweeping agreement with a newly-elected Labor government that committed unions to a "partnership" philosophy with the employers and the government. Industrial bargaining and many other trade union rights went into sharp decline during three Labor governments from 1983 to 1996. Real wages declined by 17% to 28 %, depending on industry. Union representation dropped from 51% of the workforce to 31%.

Rudd has committed to continuing Australia's imperialist foreign policy. He summarized his views in a recent interview with the foreign editor of the daily *The Australian*. Australia's armed forces, Rudd said, must be "capable of three tasks: one, the defence of Australia ...two, the maintenance of Australian security across the wider air-sea gap; and three, we're an ally of the U.S. and therefore we need a force structure capable of participation in common allied operations."

Labor supports the Howard government decision to build new ships capable of transporting large numbers of Australian soldiers abroad. Rudd says he wants an end to the country's "combat role" in Iraq and would move to a neighbouring country its training mission of Iraqi police and soldiers.

Fightback spirit growing

When Work Choices was announced in late 2004, most union leaders said "Don't fight it, let's wait and vote Labor into office." But others went into action. Militant unions in the state of Victoria won a decision at the Victoria Trades Hall Council for a statewide stopwork and protest on June 30, 2005. Then the equivalent union federations in Western Australia and Queensland agreed to hold protests in their states. This pressured the ACTU into declaring a national day of protest, to which the remaining state union federations reluctantly agreed. Around 300,000 workers mobilized across the country on June 30 and July 1.

Sustained pressure and organizing by rank and file workers and militant unions produced more actions. On November 15, 2005, 600,000 people came out, including 250,000 who marched in the streets of Melbourne, state capital of Victoria and the country's second-largest city. On June 28, 2006, approximately 200,000 joined protests across the country, as did 300,000 on November 30.

The protests in 2006 began to include illegal industrial action.

Some local victories against Work Choices have been scored through industrial action by determined unions, reversing firings, for example. Building trades and metal manufacturing workers in Victoria responded to attacks on their unions with a protest march of 20,000 in Melbourne on Sept 26.

Many trade union activists attended the recent Latin America and Asia Pacific International Solidarity Forum in Melbourne. One of the organizers of the Forum was Australia Asia Worker Links, an organization that promotes ties of solidarity between Australian workers and their counterparts in less developed countries of the region. Speakers at the Forum included leaders of revolutionary parties and mass social movements in the Asia Pacific region, spokespersons from revolutionary Venezuela, and trade union activists and leaders.

The forum was sponsored by and received support from more than a dozen trade unions in Australia. The international director of the ACTU, Alison Tate, chaired one of the Forum's sessions, and opening greetings were delivered by Brian Boyd, Secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council (state federation of unions).

Fighting for a better world

Unions in Australia are a growing part of the youth and social movements that are fighting for alternative policies on all the big issues of the day. In Sydney on September 8, more than 10,000 people defied legal threats and draconian security measures to protest a high-profile meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Council (APEC). Two days earlier, the Resistance socialist youth group helped lead a walkout of 1,500 high school students in several cities in protest against APEC and the accompanying visit of U.S. president George Bush.

Australia's environmental movement remains a force in politics. The Green Party received 842,000 votes, 7.2% of the total, in the 2004 election. Currently, there is a mass campaign to block a pulp mill in Tasmania, a large island state off Australia's southern coast. Five thousand people mobilized against the mill on Oct 14. A "Walk Against Warming" is expected to draw hundreds of thousands across Australia on November 11.

Aboriginal activists are fighting. A new aboriginal rights organization, National Aboriginal Alliance, was formed in September to provide better coordination.

A socialist alternative in the Australian election

Responding to the new spirit of struggle marking the Howard years, a new political formation, the Socialist Alliance, was formed in 2001. It brought together socialists and other activists

looking for an alternative to the pro-capitalist policies of the Labour Party. The Alliance is a registered party and is presenting 25 candidates for the parliament and senate. Dozens of union activists have joined in recent months and several trade unions are offering support. One of its affiliates and driving forces is the Democratic Socialist Perspective, a Marxist organization.

The Alliance is widely distributing three statements in the election—a Green Charter; a charter of workers rights entitled, “Working people in Australia need a party of our own”; and a “Gender Agenda” dedicated to women’s rights.

Alliance candidate and Aboriginal rights activist Sam Watson has summed up the stakes in the election with these words: “The alternative we need must put people and our planet before the profits of the giant corporations. It must enshrine the principles of democracy, solidarity and cooperation. It must learn from Indigenous tradition and respect and live in balance with the natural world.”

The Australian anti-union offensive should serve as a warning to workers in Canada and elsewhere—Australia’s is the program that bosses everywhere in the world would like to implement. We can learn much from the fightback of people there.

Roger Annis attended the Latin America and Asia Pacific International Solidarity Forum in Melbourne, October 11 to 14.