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Another Left is Possible: The Protests in France and the New Anti-Capitalist Party

By Nathan Rao

It would be wrong to see the massively successful protest actions in France [March 21] as distant and exotic, of no particular relevance to us here in Canada. With the economic meltdown heralding a new political era, and with most of the country’s Left and social movements still stunned and disoriented following their embrace of the misguided and failed Liberal-led coalition plan, the French experience is instructive and inspiring.

France has just gone through another day of mass strikes and protests against the hard-Right government of president Nicolas Sarkozy. The protest action is hugely popular in opinion polls and comes on the heels of another successful but smaller day of action on January 29, a victorious six-week general strike on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe that spread to other overseas colonial territories and the proliferation of radical protest actions among students and in a number of workplaces – all in the context of growing job losses and a deepening financial and economic crisis.

‘France’s Thatcher’ on the defensive

Not long ago, Sarkozy was widely hailed in Anglo-American circles, from the Blairite “centre-Left” across to the Bushite and Harperite neo-conservative Right, as the French Thatcher – the man that would usher in the “normalization” of French society by at long last breaking resistance to growing inequality, job insecurity, privatization and cutbacks. And yet, a mere 18 months into

his mandate the swaggering and obnoxious Sarkozy is now stumbling in the face of the resilience and scale of popular resistance.

Though still very far from being defeated, Sarkozy and the neoliberal project more generally are on the defensive in France, a country at the heart of the global capitalist and imperial order. This has not failed to raise a few eyebrows in other European and western capitals, where the fear is that developments in France will serve as an example for workers and young people in their own countries.

Further stoking these fears is the fact that Olivier Besancenot – the 34-year-old postal worker and spokesperson of the newly created New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) – has consolidated his position as by far the most popular opposition figure in the country. For several months now, polls have ranked him well ahead of the leader of the nominally social-democratic Socialist Party (PS), Martine Aubry – and even further ahead of the PS candidate in the 2007 presidential elections, Ségolène Royal, and centre-Right leader François Bayrou. Besancenot recently even earned the unusual distinction of being the only left-wing and working-class figure to be named to the Financial Times list of 50 people “who will frame the debate on the future of capitalism.”

New Party, New Politics for France’s Left

As its name suggests, the NPA has an explicitly anti-capitalist profile and its program calls for a revolutionary transformation of the country’s political institutions and property relations. It is an activist party, with a growing base of more than 10,000 members across the country involved in local organizing efforts and broad activist campaigns and the internal work and debates of the NPA itself.

The party brings together former members of the largest surviving (and now “self-dissolved”) organization of the 1968-era far-Left (the “Trotskyist” LCR), a wide array of experienced and previously non-party-affiliated trade-union and social-movement activists, a new generation of radicalized students and youth and a significant layer of people of all ages for whom the party is their first political experience ever. It is quite easily – certainly within the industrialized world at any rate – the most dynamic and radical example of attempts at fashioning a left-wing alternative to the increasingly discredited policies and institutions of neoliberalism and capitalism.

Relevant to Canada’s Left?

This is all very heady stuff. So heady, in fact, that it is tempting to see these developments in France as distant and exotic, of no particular relevance to our own work and debates here in Canada. That would be unfortunate.

To be sure, there are important differences between the context and relationship of forces in the two countries. For one thing, today’s protest movements are at least in part an extension of those that have shaken France since late 1995; and the initiative to found the NPA was taken only after a long, complicated and occasionally rancorous debate between the various political and social-movement forces involved in these movements in one way or another. It will certainly take time and a significant upsurge of protest and resistance in Canada before these kinds of debates get any kind of traction beyond the margins of political life here.

Fundamentally, however, the strategic lay of the land in the two countries is not so dramatically different. Whatever the fate of Sarkozy's cabinet in the face of the present protest movement or of Sarkozy himself in the 2012 presidential elections, the NPA are under no illusions that there will be a serious breakthrough for anti-capitalists in the short term. Even in France, the relationship of forces and rules of the institutional game are firmly stacked against such an outcome.

The NPA understand that they are just now entering a long period of rebuilding working-class and anti-systemic movements and of developing a new vision and strategy for enduring radical change. This is something the party's program describes as "21st century socialism," tipping its hat to the Bolivarian revolutionary process under way in Venezuela and other Latin American countries.

What are the broad lessons we can take away from the French experience?

For one thing, the protests and strikes, and the organizing that made them possible, show that resignation, panic and "everyone for themselves" are not the only possible responses to the onset of economic hard times. While people will often respond in a conservative and individualist manner at the onset of a crisis, there comes a time when they realize that systemic issues are at play and that only broad, collective action and political alternatives will do.

For another, the party and trade-union organizations of the traditional Left are too weakened and compromised by years of adaptation to neoliberalism and dependence on positions in parliament and the state to respond to the challenges thrown up by the hard-Right and the economic crisis. While rightly associated with a range of measures of socio-economic progress, the post-war mediations between the organized working classes, their party, trade-union and social-movement representation and the state itself were never ideal; but after 25 years of neoliberalism they have ceased even to be operative for some time now.

In France, repeated waves of mass protest and organizing over the past 13 years have failed to halt the traditional Left's drift toward the Blairite "centre-Left." As the Right and ruling elites toy with various ineffective solutions to the crisis, the forces of the "centre-Left" will be quick to latch on to the handful of "stimulus" and ersatz "Keynesian" measures that are thrown into the mix to artfully declare a major breach in the neoliberal fortress. So the crisis is just as likely to deepen the rightward trend of the traditional Left and "centre-Left" as it is to push these forces in a more radical and combative direction.

The new days of action in France provide further confirmation of this analysis. While they could not have occurred without trade-union unity at the top, this unity "from above" came about in response to pressure "from below" and simultaneously acts as a trammel on the further development of the current movement. The pressure "from below" has itself been the result of a surprising and noteworthy development – the confluence of a substantial segment of public opinion with radical sectors scattered across traditional and new trade-union groupings, local workplace and activist campaigns, the student and international-solidarity movements and the relatively small party-political organizations of the radical Left.

How a ‘radical Left’ can get a wide hearing

And this brings us to the particular significance of the NPA. It is as much a product of this surprising confluence of forces as it is a vital ingredient in ensuring that the present unity and momentum are not lost in the face of hard-Right intransigence and “centre-Left” weakness and perfidy.

In other words, the debate on political strategy and organization now occupies centre stage; and the main lesson of the NPA’s undeniable success is that a radical-Left political project can both receive a sympathetic hearing and play this strategically essential unifying and galvanizing role, on condition that:

- Its message consistently targets the systemic origins of the crisis and identifies those responsible for bringing us to the brink of economic and ecological calamity.
- It contains an iron-clad commitment to the broadest unity “in the streets” of all forces willing to oppose the right-wing agenda, overall and on an issue-by-issue basis.
- It confidently enters the electoral, institutional and media fray but strikes a position of defiance and strict independence on the question of electoral and governmental agreements and alliances with the forces of the traditional “Left” and “centre-Left” (not to mention centre-Right forces such as those around François Bayrou in France and the Liberal Party here in Canada). These forces are beyond redemption as any kind of credible vehicle for popular aspirations and seek to govern at all costs – in practice along lines that vary only slightly from those of the Right and hard-Right.
- It prioritizes work among those sectors of the population and country ignored or abandoned by the traditional institutions of the “Left” and “centre-Left.” The NPA has, for example, made a priority of organizing in the working-class and immigrant areas that have been hit hard by neoliberal structuring and were the backdrop of the banlieues revolt of late 2005. This is why the topics of racism and the precarious work imposed on young people figure prominently in the NPA’s internal discussions.
- It aims to be a grassroots force, rooted in the actual struggles and debates of workers and young people, eschewing any kind of elitist, rigid and hyper-activist model of organizing and transformation, throwing its doors wide open to seasoned activists and interested newcomers alike, while creating a democratic and transparent framework for collective discussion, decision-making, action and the drawing of balance-sheets.
- It takes a long-term approach to its project of social and political transformation and understands that we are in an extended period of resistance and development of alternatives to capitalism and imperialism. While history and politics always have surprises in store, especially in a period of deep crisis such as now, the relationship of forces is too unfavourable, and the vision of an alternative too weak, to expect major breakthroughs on an institutional level in the near term. Better to understand this and get down to the serious work of organizing and rethinking than to feed technocratic and armchair illusions about quick fixes and imminent elite-level “paradigm shifts.”

A new generation's 'New Left'

Finally, the protest movements in France and the birth of the NPA inaugurate a new chapter in the life of the international radical Left, especially when viewed in tandem with the developments of recent years in Latin America. The fact that the main figure associated with events in France was born in the mid-1970s also signals the emergence of a new generation of radicals.

We had a whiff of this trend during the wave of anti-globalization protests ushered in by the Battle of Seattle in 1999. But now it appears to be asserting itself much more forcefully, with a larger and more receptive audience than the one that existed just a short time ago. This, too, is a tremendously important and encouraging development.

Nathan Rao attended the founding convention of the NPA in Paris earlier this year. He lives in Toronto and is a supporter of the Socialist Project. This article was originally published in Rabble.ca is reproduced with permission.

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21st Century Socialism on the Move – Reflections on ‘The Path to Human Development’

By Ivan Drury

Within an otherwise bleak reality of capitalist crisis, Mike Lebowitz has provided us with an eloquent restatement of the case for socialism – *The Path to Human Development: Capitalism or Socialism?* This short text is now circulating widely in Venezuela, in Spanish, as a pocket-sized pamphlet, has been published in *Monthly Review*, and is about to be published in Canada in pamphlet format by Socialist Project.

This is not the first text Lebowitz has published on the need to argue, fight for, and build socialism. *The Path* was written on the foundation of Lebowitz’s 2004 book *Build It Now!* Both works were written with the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela in mind. This is no accident. Lebowitz, a professor from Canada, has been living in Venezuela for years and has been an active participant in the Bolivarian revolution. The imprint of that revolutionary process is strongly stamped on this short work.

The Path argues that: (1) Full development of creative human potential is the goal of life for human beings; (2) This full development is impossible under capitalism. (3) Socialism – protagonist democracy in the economy and all aspects of social life – is the path to human development.

Path breaking: a return to a socialist offensive

In the minds of many workers and anti-capitalist activists, the positive attributes of the socialist goal are obscured by the monsters of 20th century bureaucratic states. The general points raised by *The Path* stand as corrections to this legacy of Stalinist horrors. Such states that claimed the mantle of communism have nothing in common with Lebowitz’s “development of human potential.”

The Path states, “Our goal cannot be a society in which some people are able to develop their capacities and others are not: we are interdependent, we are all members of a human family. The full development of all human potential is our goal.” This recalls the manuscripts of the young Marx, where he sketches the blocks capitalism puts up against the free development of the creative, “sensuous” life of people. Lebowitz returns this theme in asking, “What do we all want?” and answers “To be all that we can be.”

From decades of defense and retreat, in which socialism has been defined by excuse or apology for Stalinist crimes, *The Path* forges, yes, a path. It is a return to the offensive – defining the ideological terrain of 21st Century Socialism.

Internationalism at the heart of The Path.

There are no We workers and Those workers in *The Path*. “The struggle between capitalists and workers ... revolves around a struggle over the degree of separation among workers,” Lebowitz

points out. “The premise is not at all that we have the individual right to consume things without limit but, rather, that we recognize the centrality of ‘the worker’s own need for development.’ ”

And at the same time, “As a human being in human society, you also have the obligation to other members of this human family to make certain that they also have this opportunity, that they too can develop their potential.” *The Path* does not draw any national borders around this human question.

For revolutionaries in imperialist countries this must sound loudly. At a time of great capitalist crisis and especially given the organizational and public-political weakness of the left, there is a great danger that the angers of many workers be directed at constructed Others: immigrants, racialized people, and particularly at people racialized as Islamic. *The Path* proposes “human society,” the “human family” – in other words, internationalism – as the axis of struggle. It demands equal access by all to everything each needs for their personal development.

A direct appeal to workers in imperialist countries

The Path’s rejection of a purely economic measure of standards of living is especially prescient. In the larger context of universal human development, he argues, money is not the point. This does not cancel out the important and constant struggles for improvements in the economic sphere, but reminds us that these struggles are part of a bigger picture. From that point of view, “Whether workers wages are high or low is not the issue any more than whether the rations of slaves are high or low.”

Lebowitz argues that the working class has in common – regardless of wage levels – a spiritual poverty based in alienation from the fruits of their labour. He sees consumerism – even and perhaps especially for workers who make “good money” – as substitution for meaning, within an alienated condition: “We try to fill the vacuum of our lives with the things we are driven to consume.”

So, on top of its internationalist appeal, *The Path* challenges the “well-paid” worker to reexamine what we really want from life for ourselves and those we love. and whether capitalism will allow these desires. For those revolutionary activists (like me) who vacillate daily on the question of whether the imperialist/colonialist country working class has revolutionary potential, this challenge is encouragement not to lose hope amongst the details.

The vicious circle of capital

Lebowitz points out the difficulty of advancing revolutionary ideas – even within capitalist crisis. But where Jim Stanford, Canadian Union of Auto Workers economist, reaches for a neo-Keynesian outlook out of hesitations with socialism, Lebowitz maintains that such difficulty is precisely why revolutionary ideas must be sown through practice. “No crisis necessarily leads people to question the system itself. People struggle against specific aspects of capitalism ... but unless they understand the nature of the system, they struggle merely for a nicer capitalism, a capitalism with a human face.”

He outlines what he calls the “vicious circle of capitalism” where people without are compelled to sell their labour power to fulfill their material needs of survival. Then, having consumed, they

are compelled anew to “produce for capital’s goals.” These “phases are interdependent, you cannot change one without changing them all.”

The virtuous circle of socialism

Against the “vicious circle” of capitalism, Lebowitz advocates what he calls the “virtuous circle” of socialism. Here his points may be less familiar to anti-capitalists and workers skeptical regarding socialism.

Lebowitz’s ideas begin with the concept of human development, are worked out through understanding the inhuman laws of capitalism, defined through working out its opposite, and developed by returning again to his premise of human development. Lebowitz outlines how socialism can and must accommodate all levels of human need – not just the material. The Path sees material security as the precondition for universal spiritual, cultural, creative development.

The Path outlines the “virtuous circle” of socialism: “We begin with producers who live within a society characterized by solidarity” who “enter into an association in order to produce for the needs of society and in this process develop and expand their capacities as rich human beings. Thus the product of their activity is producers who recognize their unity and their need for each other.”

Protagonism, the state, and socialist struggle

Lebowitz paints a vivid and living picture of the formation of a post-capitalist society in utero, through Venezuela’s Bolivarian cooperatives and other base organizations. He poses these revolutionary organizations as the foundations upon which post-capitalist society will be constructed.

He argues for the Venezuelan concept of “protagonism.” By creating mass organizations (in workplaces and in the neighborhoods) people can take control over the direction of their lives and satisfaction of their desires. Protagonism is a path to and, at the same time, the developing definition of a revolutionary democracy which can only be born of practice.

This is an important imaging. It is critical that we conceptualize and live the revolutionary process as a great organism and not as a vanguard atop a complacent mass. *The Path* asks and answers the question of why we should fight for socialism, but it is important to note some questions it leaves hanging.

Capitalist protagonism

If workers and other oppressed people are not protagonist today – in capitalist society – then who is? Workers’ protagonism (by “workers” I mean all working and oppressed peoples, to include Indigenous people, poor unemployed people, farmers, unofficial workers, etc.) can only be built through overturning protagonism as we know it – capitalist protagonism. *The Path* does not fully deal with capitalist protagonism, or what Antonio Gramsci called hegemony, but many times Lebowitz points in this direction.

Capitalist protagonism is embodied in the state. Lebowitz points out that “capital creates the state it needs.” While Lebowitz talks about economic regulation and ongoing “primitive

accumulation” or capitalist expropriation, it is also possible to extract a broader generalization. The state includes the government and all its national and international institutions. Through these protagonist bodies, the state is joined arm in sleeve with capital.

Whether the mass deregulation and privatization of neo-liberal reforms or mass bailouts of crisis-hobbled banks, auto companies and mortgage firms, the state carries out these demands of capital. And when Chilean President Salvador Allende (to pick an example not so far from Venezuela), threatened the protagonism of capital within the government itself, another branch of the state – the army generals – smashed him and the Chilean socialist movement with terrible violence and murder.

The Venezuelan experience proves that it is possible for class struggle to be carried out within the halls of capitalist protagonism. But it also shows the limits of the possible within a capitalist state apparatus. What we see at play in Venezuela is a constant battle between opposing protagonisms – the capitalist and the workers – in open struggle for power. This struggle must end with workers extending workers’ protagonist democracy to all aspects of life and all fields of production by depriving the capitalist class of the state, what Lebowitz calls “capital’s ultimate weapon.” Lebowitz does not deal with this directly, but he does point out that capital “never stops trying to undermine any gains that workers have made either through their direct economic actions or through political activity.”

As Marx and Engels outlined it in the *Communist Manifesto*: “The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.” Anything less than abolishment of the capitalist state leaves the capitalist class a ready weapon for counter-revolution, and leaves working people the prospect of losing at any moment all gains fought for and won.

The Path as weapon against capitalist barbarism

In the introduction to *The Path*, Mike Lebowitz explains that he intended it as a weapon “in the struggle against barbarism.” But a weapon is only effective if used. The Path is written to be studied in groups, and it deserves such attention – both from seasoned veterans of the socialist and anti-capitalist movements and from people who have never read a Marxist essay or been to a demonstration before. The Path educates and challenges in its reasoned appeals to revolutionary practice.

The publication of *The Path* can be important for the regeneration of the international socialist movement. Today workers all over the world are afraid and wondering what will become of them and why. *The Path* not only poses answers to the questions of why, but imagines how life could be different, how a better world is possible and what it might look like. It could not have been published at a more critical time.

The Path to Human Development has been published online by *Monthly Review* at <http://monthlyreview.org/090223lebowitz.php> and by Socialist Project at <http://www.socialistproject.ca/documents/ThePath.pdf>

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Not an Analogy: Israel and the Crime of Apartheid

By Hazem Jamjoum

In recent years, increasing numbers of people around the world have begun adopting and developing an analysis of Israel as an apartheid regime.[1] This can be seen in the ways that the global movement in support of the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle is taking on a pointedly anti-apartheid character, as evidenced by the growth of Israeli Apartheid Week.[2]

Further, much of the recent international diplomatic support for Israel has increasingly taken on the form of denying that racial discrimination is a root cause of the oppression of Palestinians, something that has taken on new levels of absurdity in Western responses to the April 2009 Durban Review Conference.[3]

Many of the writings stemming from this analysis work to detail levels of similarity and difference with Apartheid South Africa, rather than looking at apartheid as a system that can be practiced by any state. To some extent, this strong emphasis on historical comparisons is understandable given that Boycotts, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) is the central campaign called for by Palestinian civil society to express solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle, and is modeled on the one that helped end South African Apartheid.

However, an over-emphasis on similarities and differences confines the use of the term to narrow limits. With the expanding agreement that the term “apartheid” is useful in describing the level and layout of Israel’s crimes, it is important that our understanding of the apartheid label be deepened, both as a means of informing activism in support of the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle, and in order to most effectively make use of comparisons with other struggles.

The Apartheid analogy

It is perhaps understandable that some advocates of Palestinian rights look at the Apartheid label, in its comparative sense, as a politically useful tool. The struggle of the South African people for justice and equality reached a certain sacred status in the 1980s and 1990s when the anti-Apartheid struggle reached its zenith.

The reverence with which activists and non-activists alike look to the righteousness of the South African struggle, and the ignominy of the colonial Apartheid regime are well placed. Black South Africans fought against both Dutch and British colonization for centuries, endured countless hardships including imprisonment and death, and were labeled terrorists as the powers of the world stood by the racist Apartheid regime. They remained steadfast in their struggle, raising the cost of maintaining the Apartheid system until South African capital found it no longer profitable and white political elites found it impossible to maintain.

Comparison bonus points can also be scored by pointing to the deep historic connection between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the African National Congress (ANC), as well as the unabashed alliance between Israel and the South African Apartheid regime, which remained strong even at the height of the international boycott against South Africa.

A further impetus for confining the apartheid label to a comparison with South Africa is that the commonalities and similarities between the liberation struggles of South Africa and Palestine are quite stark. Both cases involved a process of settler-colonialism involving the forced displacement of the indigenous population from most of their ancestral lands and concentrating them in townships and reservations; dividing up the Black population into different groups with differing rights; strict mobility restrictions that suffocated the colonized; and the use of brutal military force to repress any actual or potential resistance against the racist colonial regime. Both regimes enjoyed the impunity that results from full U.S. and European support.

Accompanying these and countless other similarities are a host of uncanny details common to both cases: both regimes were formally established in the same year – 1948 – following decades of British rule; control of approximately 87% of the land was off limits to most of the colonized population without special permission, and so on. While we speak here in the past tense, all of this still applies to present-day Palestine.

As the Israeli apartheid label has gained ground, some have adopted the approach of describing the differences between the two regimes, albeit for various purposes. In general, Israel has not legislated petty apartheid – the segregation of spaces such as bathrooms and beaches – as was the case in South Africa, although Israeli laws form the basis of systematic racial discrimination against Palestinians. The 1.2 million Palestinian citizens of Israel (approximately 20% of Israel's citizens) do indeed have the right to vote and run in Israeli elections while the Black community in South Africa, for the most part, did not.

The South African version of apartheid's central tenet was to facilitate the exploitation of as many Black labourers as possible, whereas the Israeli version, although exploiting Palestinian workers, prioritizes the forced displacement of as many Palestinians as possible beyond the borders of the state with the aim of eradicating Palestinian presence within historic Palestine. South African visitors to Palestine have often commented on the fact that Israeli use of force is more brutal than that witnessed in the heyday of Apartheid, and several commentators have thus taken the position that Israel's practices are worse than Apartheid; that the apartheid label does not go far enough.

Israel and the crime of apartheid

In terms of law, describing Israel as an apartheid state does not revolve around levels of difference and similarity with the policies and practices of the South African Apartheid regime, and where Israel is an apartheid state only insofar as similarities outweigh differences. In 1973, the UN General Assembly adopted the *International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid* (General Assembly resolution 3068 [XXVIII]).[4]

This convention entered into force on July 18, 1976 (the year of the Soweto uprising in South Africa and of the Land Day uprising in Palestine) with a universal definition of the crime of apartheid not limited to the borders of South Africa. The fact that apartheid is defined as a crime under the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*[5], which entered into force in 2002 – long after the Apartheid regime was defeated in South Africa – attests to the universality of the crime.

While the wording of the definition of the crime of apartheid varies between legal instruments, the substance is the same: a regime commits apartheid when it institutionalizes discrimination to create and maintain the domination of one “racial” group over another. Karine Mac Allister, among others, has provided a cogent legal analysis of the applicability of the crime of apartheid to the Israeli regime.[6]

The main point is that like genocide and slavery, apartheid is a crime that any state can commit, and institutions, organizations and/or individuals acting on behalf of the state that commits it or supports its commission are to face trial in any state that is a signatory to the Convention, or in the International Criminal Court. It is therefore a fallacy to ground the Israeli apartheid label on comparisons of the policies of the South African Apartheid regime, with the resulting descriptions of Israel as being “Apartheid-like” and characterizations of an apartheid analysis of Israel as an “Apartheid analogy.”

Recognition by the international community of such universal crimes is often the result of a particular case, so heinous that it forces the rusty wheels of international decision-making into motion. The Transatlantic Slave Trade is an example where the mass enslavement of people from the African continent to work as the privately owned property of European settlers formed an important part of the framework in which the drafters of the 1956 *UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery* thought and acted.

An even clearer example is the *Genocide Convention* (adopted 1948, entered into force 1951) in the wake of the Nazi Holocaust in which millions of Jews, communists, Roma and disabled were systematically murdered with the intention to end their existence. We do not describe modern day enslavement as “slavery-like,” nor do we examine the mass killing of hundreds of thousands of mainly Tutsi Rwandans through a Rwandan “Genocide analogy.”

Two points made by Mac Allister in her legal analysis of Israeli apartheid deserve to be reiterated because they are often confused or misconstrued even by advocates of Palestinian human rights. First, Israel’s crimes and violations are not limited to the crime of apartheid. Rather, Israel’s regime over the Palestinian people combines apartheid, military occupation, and colonization in a unique manner. It deserves notice that the relationship between these three components requires further research and investigation. Also noteworthy is the Palestinian BDS Campaign National Committee (BNC)’s “United Against Apartheid, Colonialism and Occupation: Dignity & Justice for the Palestinian People” [7] position paper, which outlines and, to some extent, details the various aspects of Israel’s commission of the crime of apartheid, and begins to trace the interaction between Israeli apartheid, colonialism and occupation from the perspective of Palestinian civil society.

The second point worth reiterating is that Israel’s regime of apartheid is not limited to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In fact, the core of Israel’s apartheid regime is guided by discriminatory legislation in the fields of nationality, citizenship and land ownership, and that was primarily employed to oppress and dispossess those Palestinians who were forcibly displaced in the 1948 Nakba (refugees and internally displaced), as well as the minority who managed to remain within the “green line” and later became Israeli citizens.[8]

Israel's apartheid regime was extended into West Bank and Gaza Strip following the 1967 occupation for the purpose of colonization, and military control over the Palestinians who came under occupation. Using again the example of South Africa, the crime of apartheid was not limited to the Bantustans; the whole regime was implicated and not one or another of its racist manifestations.

The analysis of Israel as an apartheid state has proven to be very important in several respects. First, it correctly highlights racial discrimination as a root cause of Israel's oppression of Palestinians. Second, one of the main effects of Israeli apartheid is that it has separated Palestinians – conceptually, legally and physically – into different groupings (refugees, West Bank, Gaza, within the 'green line' and a host of other divisions within each), resulting in the fragmentation of the Palestinian liberation movement, including the solidarity movement. The apartheid analysis enables us to provide a legal and conceptual framework under which we can understand, convey, and take action in support of the Palestinian people and their struggle as a unified whole. Third, and of particular significance to the solidarity movement, this legal and conceptual framework takes on the prescriptive role underpinning the growing global movement for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law.

Colonialism and the role of comparison

I have argued that the question of whether apartheid applies cannot be determined by means of comparison with South Africa, but rather by legal analysis. This, however, does not mean that comparative study is not useful. Comparison is in fact essential to the process of learning historical lessons for those involved in struggle. A central importance of comparison with South Africa stems from the fact that the South African struggle against apartheid was, as it continues to be for the indigenous people of Palestine and the Americas, a struggle against colonialism.

Focusing on the colonial dimension of Israeli apartheid and the Zionist project enables us to maintain our focus on the issues that really matter, such as land acquisition, demographic engineering, and methods of political and economic control exercised by one racial group over another. Comparison with other anti-colonial struggles provides the main resource for understanding this colonial dimension of Israeli oppression, and for deriving some of the lessons needed to fight it.

One of the many lessons from the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa stems from the fact that the ANC leadership was pressured to compromise on its economic demands such as land restitution. Only a tiny proportion of white-controlled land in South Africa was redistributed to Blacks after 1994. As such, while the struggle of the South African people defeated the system of political apartheid, the struggle against economic apartheid continues in various forms including anti-poverty and landless peoples' movements today. As Palestinians and those struggling with them work to reconstruct a political strategy and consensus on how to overcome the challenges of the post-Oslo period, the centrality of the demand for land restitution should be highlighted as part of the demand for refugee return.

A second lesson of major importance comes in response to the paradigm currently guiding most mainstream accounts of how to achieve the elusive “peace in the Middle East,” which is the idea of partition often referred to as the two-state “solution.” In the 1970s, South Africa tried to deal with its “demographic problem” – the fact that the vast majority of its population was Black but did not have the right to vote. The Apartheid regime reconstructed South Africa as a formal democracy by reinventing the British-established reservations (the Bantustans) as independent states.[9]

These ten “homelands” were each assigned to an ethnicity decided by Pretoria, and indigenous South Africans who did not fit into one of the ethnicities were forced to make themselves fit in order to become nationals of one of the homelands. Through this measure, members of the indigenous population were reclassified as nationals of one or another homeland, and between 1976 and 1981 the regime tried to pass the homelands off as independent states: Transkei in 1976, Bophuthatswana in 1977, Venda in 1979, and Ciskei in 1981.

Each of these Bantustans was given a flag and a government made up of indigenous intermediaries on the Pretoria payroll, and all the trappings of a sovereign government including responsibility over municipal services and a police force to protect the Apartheid regime, but without actual sovereignty. The idea was that by getting international recognition for each of these homelands as states, the Apartheid regime would transform South Africa from a country with a 10% white minority, to one with a 100% white majority. Since it was a democratic regime within the confines of the dominant community, the state’s democratic nature would be beyond reproach.

No one was fooled. The ANC launched a powerful campaign to counter any international recognition of the Bantustans as independent states, and the plot failed miserably at the international level – with the notable, but perhaps unsurprising, exception that a lone “embassy” for Bophuthatswana was opened in Tel Aviv.

Israel has employed similar strategies in Palestine. For example, Israel recognized 18 Palestinian Bedouin tribes and appointed a loyal Sheikh for each in the Naqab during the 1950s as a means of controlling these southern Palestinians, forcing those who did not belong to one of the tribes to affiliate to one in order to get Israeli citizenship.[10] In the late 1970s, the Israeli regime tried to invent Palestinian governing bodies for the 1967 occupied territory in the form of “village leagues” intended to evolve into similar non-sovereign governments; glorified municipalities of a sort. As with Apartheid’s Homelands, the scheme failed miserably, both because the PLO had established itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and because Palestinians largely understood the plot and opposed it with all means at their disposal.

The main lesson for Israel was that the PLO would have to either be completely destroyed or would have to be transformed into Israeli apartheid’s indigenous intermediary. Israel launched a massive campaign to destroy the PLO throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. In the early 1990s, and with the demise of the PLO’s main backers such as the Soviet bloc and Iraq, Israel capitalized on the opportunity, and worked to transform the PLO from a liberation movement to

a “state-building” project that was launched by the signing of the Oslo accords, seven months before South Africa’s first free election.

The push for the establishment and international recognition of an independent Palestinian state within the Palestinian Bantustan is no different from the South African Apartheid regime’s campaign to gain international recognition of Transkei or Ciskei. This is the core of the “two-state solution” idea. The major and crucial difference is that in the current Palestinian case, it is the world’s superpower and its adjutants in Europe and the Arab world pushing as well, and armed with the active acceptance of Palestine’s indigenous intermediaries.

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Notes:

[1] I use capital ‘A’ in Apartheid to denote the regime of institutionalized racial superiority implemented in South Africa 1948-1994, and lower-case ‘a’ to indicate the generally applicable crime of apartheid.

[2] See www.apartheidweek.org.

[3] See Amira Howeidi, “Israel’s Right Not to Be Criticized”, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 19-25 March 2009. Also see the Palestinian civil society response at <http://israelreview.bdsmovement.net>.

[4] For the full text of the Convention see: www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/11.htm.

[5] For the full text of the Statute see: http://untreaty.un.org/cod/icc/statute/99_corr/cstatute.htm.

[6] See Karine Mac Allister, “Applicability of the Crime of Apartheid to Israel”, *al-Majdal* #38 (Summer 2008): www.badil.org/al-majdal/2008/summer/articles02.htm.

[7] This is the Palestinian civil society position paper for the April 2009 Durban Review Conference in Geneva, and can be downloaded at: http://bdsmovement.net/files/English-BNC_Position_Paper-Durban_Review.pdf.

[8] For a discussion of how Israel’s apartheid legislation continues to affect refugees and Palestinian citizens of Israel with regards to control over land see Uri Davis, *Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the Struggle Within*, London: Zed Books, 2003.

[9] British rule in South Africa established reserves in 1913 and 1936 on approximately 87% of the land of South Africa for the purpose of segregating the Black population from the settlers.

[10] For more on this see: Hazem Jamjoum, “al-Naqab: The Ongoing Displacement of Palestine’s Southern Bedouin”, *al-Majdal* #39-40, (Autumn 2008/Winter 2009): www.badil.org/al-majdal/2008/autumn-winter/articles03.htm.

Socialist Voice #318, April 18, 2009

Americas Summit: ALBA Nations Condemn Capitalism

***Introduction.** The following statement was issued on April 17 by six of the seven governments of the ALBA economic and social alliance in Latin America. (The seventh member, Ecuador, was unable to attend the meeting.) Speaking in Australia, Luis Bilbao, editor of the monthly magazine América XXI (published in Venezuela, Argentina and Uruguay), described the statement as “profound” and “historic.”*

“We have seven governments of the world speaking in language that used to be the reserve of left parties only,” Bilbao said. “Gone is diplomatic language to discuss the political and economic situation facing Latin America and the Caribbean and their relation with the United States. Instead, we read that the draft statement of the Summit of the Americas is considered ‘inadequate and unacceptable.’ The ALBA countries declare that an entirely different approach to the world’s problems is required.

“In opposition to the Summit statement is a radical and far-reaching declaration of anti-capitalism and socialism. This is something which the world’s left wing parties must make known to the peoples of the world.”

Document of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA) countries for the 5th Summit of the Americas

Cumaná, April 17, 2009

The heads of state and governments of Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela, member countries of ALBA, consider that the proposed Declaration of the 5th Summit of the Americas is insufficient and unacceptable for the following reasons:

- It offers no answers to the issue of the Global Economic Crisis, despite the fact that this constitutes the largest challenge faced by humanity in decades and the most serious threat in the current epoch to the wellbeing of our peoples.
- It unjustifiably excludes Cuba in a criminal manner, without reference to the general consensus that exists in the region in favour of condemning the blockade and the isolation attempts, which its people and government have incessantly objected to.

For these reasons, the member countries of ALBA consider that consensus does not exist in favour of adopting this proposed declaration and in light of the above; we propose to have a thoroughgoing debate over the following issues:

1) Capitalism is destroying humanity and the planet. What we are living through is a global economic crisis of a systemic and structural character and not just one more cyclical crisis. Those who think that this crisis will be resolved with an injection of fiscal money and with some regulatory measures are very mistaken.

The financial system is in crisis because it is quoting the value of financial paper at six times the real value of goods and services being produced in the world. This is not a “failure of the regulation of the system” but rather a fundamental part of the capitalist system that speculates with all goods and values in the pursuit of obtaining the maximum amount of profit possible. Until now, the economic crisis has created 100 million more starving people and more than 50 million new unemployed people, and these figures are tending to increasing.

2) Capitalism has provoked an ecological crisis by subordinating the necessary conditions for life on this planet to the domination of the market and profit. Each year, the world consumes a third more than what the planet is capable of regenerating. At this rate of wastage by the capitalist system, we are going to need two planets by the year 2030.

3) The global economic, climate change, food and energy crises are products of the decadence of capitalism that threatens to put an end to the existence of life and the planet. To avoid this outcome it is necessary to develop an alternative model to that of the capitalist system. A system based on:

- Solidarity and complementarity and not competition;
- A system in harmony with our Mother Earth rather than the looting of our natural resources;
- A system based on cultural diversity and not the crushing of cultures and impositions of cultural values and lifestyles alien to the realities of our countries;
- A system of peace based on social justice and not on imperialist wars and policies;
- In synthesis, a system that restores the human condition of our societies and peoples rather than reducing them to simple consumers or commodities.

4) As a concrete expression of the new reality on the continent, Latin American and Caribbean countries have begun to construct their own institutions, whose roots lie in the common history that goes back to our independence revolution, and which constitutes a concrete instrument for deepening the processes of social, economic and cultural transformation that will consolidate our sovereignty. The ALBA-TCP [TCP – Peoples Trade Agreement], Petrocaribe and UNASUR [Union of South American Nations], to only cite the most recently created one, are mechanisms for solidarity-based union forged in the heat of these transformations, with the manifest intention of strengthening the efforts of our peoples to reach their own liberation.

In order to confront the grave effects of the global economic crisis, the ALBA-TCP countries have taken innovative and transformational measures that seek real alternatives to the deficient international economic order, rather than strengthening these failed institutions. That is why we have set in motion a Single System of Regional Compensation, the SUCRE, that includes a Common Accounting Unit, a Payments Clearing House and a Single System of Reserves.

At the same time, we have promoted the establishment of grand national companies in order to satisfy the fundamental necessities of our peoples, implementing mechanisms of just and complementary trade, that leave to one side the absurd logic of unrestrained competition.

5) We question the G20's decision to triple the amount of resources going to the International Monetary Fund, when what is really necessary is the establishment of a new world economic order that includes the total transformation of the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO [World Trade Organisation], who with their neoliberal condition have contributed to this global economic crisis.

6) The solutions to the global economic crisis and the definition of a new international financial architecture should be adopted with the participation of the 192 countries that between June 1 and 3 will meet at a United Nations conference about the international financial crisis, in order to propose the creation of a new international economic order.

7) In regards to the climate change crisis, the developed countries have an ecological debt to the world, because they are responsible for 70% of historic emissions of carbon accumulated in the atmosphere since 1750.

The developed countries, in debt to humanity and the planet, should contribute significant resources towards a fund so that the countries on the path towards development can undertake a model of growth that does not repeat the grave impacts of capitalist industrialisation.

8) The solutions to the energy, food and climate change crises have to be integral and interdependent. We cannot resolve a problem creating others in the areas fundamental to life. For example, generalising the use of agrofuels can only impact negatively on the price of food and in the utilisation of essential resources such as water, land and forests.

9) We condemn discrimination against migrants in all its forms. Migration is a human right, not a crime. Therefore, we demand an urgent reform to the migration policies of the United States government, with the objective of halting deportations and mass raids, allowing the reunification of families, and we demand the elimination of the wall that divides and separates us, rather than uniting us.

In this sense, we demand the repeal of the Cuban Adjustment Act and the elimination of the policies of Wetbacks-Drybacks, which has a discriminatory and selective character, and is the cause of loss of human lives.

Those that are truly to blame for the financial crisis are the bankers that steal money and the resources of our countries, not migrant workers. Human rights come first, particularly the human rights of the most unprotected and marginalised sectors of our society, as undocumented workers are.

For there to be integration there must be free circulation of people, and equal human rights for all regardless of migratory status. Brain drain constitutes a form of looting of qualified human resources by the rich countries.

10) Basic services such as education, health, water, energy and telecommunications have to be declared human rights and cannot be the objects of private business nor be commodified by the World Trade Organisation. These services are and should be essential, universally accessible public services.

11) We want a world where all countries, big and small, have the same rights and empires do not exist. We oppose intervention. Strengthen, as the only legitimate channel for discussion and analysis of bilateral and multilateral agendas of the continent, the base of mutual respect between states and governments, under the principal of non-interference of one state over another and the inviolability of the sovereignty and self-determination of the peoples.

We demand that the new government of the United States, whose inauguration has generated some expectations in the region and the world, put an end to the long and nefarious tradition of interventionism and aggression that has characterised the actions of the governments of this country throughout its history, especially brutal during the government of George W. Bush.

In the same way, we demand that it eliminate interventionist practices such as covert operations, parallel diplomacy, media wars aimed at destabilising states and governments, and the financing of destabilising groups. It is fundamental that we construct a world in which a diversity of economic, political, social and cultural approaches are recognised and respected.

12) Regarding the United States blockade against Cuba and the exclusion of this country from the Summit of the Americas, the countries of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA) reiterates the position that all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean adopted last December 16, 2008, regarding the necessity of putting an end to the economic, trade and financial blockade imposed by the government of the United States of America against Cuba, including the application of the denominated Helms-Burton law and that among its paragraphs notes:

“CONSIDERING the resolutions approved by the United Nations General Assembly on the need to put an end to the economic, commercial, and financial embargo imposed by the United States on Cuba and the decisions on the latter approved at several international meetings,

“DECLARE that in defence of free trade and the transparent practice of international trade, it is unacceptable to apply unilateral coercive measures that will affect the well-being of nations and obstruct the processes of integration.

“WE REJECT the implementation of laws and measures that contradict International Law such as the Helms-Burton law and urge the U.S. Government to put an end to its implementation.

WE ASK the U.S. Government to comply with the 17 successive resolutions approved at the United Nations General Assembly and put an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo it has imposed on Cuba.”

Moreover, we believe that the attempt to impose isolation on Cuba, which today is an integral part of the Latin American and Caribbean region, is a member of the Rio Group and other organisations and regional mechanisms, that carries out a policy of cooperation and solidarity with the people of the region, that promotes the full integration of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples, has failed, and that, therefore, no reason exists to justify its exclusion from the Summit of the Americas.

13) The developed countries have allocated no less than \$8 trillion towards rescuing the financial structure that has collapsed. They are the same ones that do not comply with spending a small sum to reach the Millennium Goals or 0.7% of GDP for Official Development Aid. Never before have we seen so nakedly the hypocrisy of the discourse of the rich countries. Cooperation has to be established without conditions and adjusted to the agendas of the receiving countries, simplifying the procedures, making resources accessible and privileging issues of social inclusion.

14) The legitimate struggle against narco-trafficking and organised crime, and any other manifestation of the denominated “new threats,” should not be utilised as excuses for carrying out acts of interference or intervention against our countries.

15) We are firmly convinced that change, which all the world is hoping for, can only come about through the organisation, mobilisation and unity of our peoples.

As the Liberator well stated: “The unity of our peoples is not simply the chimera of men, but an inexorable fate”- Simón Bolívar.

Translation by Socialist Voice, based on a translation by Federico Fuentes, Bolivia Rising

Socialist Voice #319, April 20, 2009

50 Years After: The Tragedy of China's 'Great Leap Forward'

By John Riddell

On October 1, the People's Republic of China will mark the 60th anniversary of its foundation. This will be an occasion to celebrate one of the most influential victories of popular struggle in our era.

This great uprising forged a united and independent Chinese state, freed the country from foreign domination and capitalist rule, ended landlordism, provided broad access to education and health care, and set in motion popular energies that modernized and industrialized its economy. The revolutionary triumph of 1949 laid the foundation for China's present dynamism and influence, as well as providing an enormous impetus to anti-colonial revolution worldwide.

Yet despite these gains, the socialist movement and ideology that headed the revolution, identified with Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong, disappeared from China soon after his death in 1976. The revolution's central leader is still revered, but his doctrines have been set aside. The country's present leadership has promoted private capitalist accumulation, not socialist planning, as China's chief engine of growth. Its policies have aroused much popular protest, but not a revived Maoist movement.

How was revolutionary China diverted onto a capitalist path? This setback has a lengthy prehistory, reaching back to the impact on Chinese Communist Party of policies identified with Joseph Stalin in the late 1920s. But much can be learned by considering the first major setback of the People's Republic, a dark episode that reached its culmination exactly 50 years ago. This was China's 1958-60 "Great Leap Forward" – an ambitious and failed attempt to jump-start rapid industrialization by reshaping China's countryside.

Revolutionary breakthrough

The first years of the People's Republic saw great progress in every sphere: the forging of a unified state; facing down imperialist reprisals, including by halting the U.S. military in the 1950-53 Korean War; surviving isolation and reprisals; economic revival; and the beginnings of industrialization. Above all, the Chinese peasantry, the driving force of the revolution, carried out a radical land reform and restored the rural economy. In 1955 almost the entire peasantry pooled its lands in cooperative farms.

But as China's first Five-Year Plan for economic development drew to a close in 1957, there were signs of disequilibrium, including massive unemployment in the cities and underutilization of labour in the countryside, ills that China's focus on capital-intensive heavy industry had failed to address.

The Communist Party leadership responded with a plan for "simultaneous development" of heavy and light industry, carried out in both urban centres and rural areas, in a crash campaign to

mobilize a large portion of the rural workforce in labour-intensive industrial and infrastructural development.

The goals were praiseworthy, but how was this massive new industrial work force to be organized and fed?

‘Great Leap’

It was this challenge that inspired the launch of the Great Leap Forward at the beginning of 1958 – a campaign to produce “more, faster, better, and cheaper.”

In factories, hours of work were lengthened and production quotas raised. In rural areas, small-scale industrial projects were started up, the most publicized being “backyard blast furnaces” to produce iron and steel. Peasants were mobilized for major irrigation and other land-improvement projects.

Planning was based on projections that food production per hectare could be swiftly increased five to 20 times over, through introduction of large-scale collective farms and the use of new, unproven techniques of cultivation. These projections inspired Mao to declare that “planting one-third [of the land] is enough.” So labour could safely be diverted to industrial projects.

As the campaign unfolded, a new social form was invented – the “people’s communes” – each of which organized tens of thousands of peasants for collective field labour, industrial work, and land improvement projects. In the course of 1958, several hundred million peasants were enrolled in the communes.

Broadly speaking, the program was modeled on collectivization in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin after 1928, a program that aimed to enable the state to get direct control of peasant production and divert a large part of it to the support of industrialization.

As in the Soviet Union, the results in China were discouraging. National economic planning gave way under the strain. Shortages of raw materials and transportation blockages spread. Some rural industry projects took root, but waste was enormous, and rural steel production proved a costly failure. Floods and droughts aggravated the crisis.

Most ominous of all, agriculture was crippled by the many forms of disruption engendered by the communes, and the grain harvest fell by about 30%. By 1959, the entire country was gripped by hunger, which lasted through 1960. Starvation claimed millions of victims. It took 15 years to bring per-capita grain production back up to pre-Great Leap levels.

Famine and revolution

It is not unusual for the upheaval of revolution to be accompanied by a crisis of food production.

The young Russian Soviet republic, for example, experienced a severe famine in 1920-21. Its causes were clear: seven years of devastation by war and civil war, which had led to a collapse of urban-rural economic exchange. The Soviet government energetically publicized this tragedy, calling in aid organizations set up by the world workers’ movement as well as pro-capitalist agencies such as the American Relief Agency headed by later U.S. president Herbert Hoover.

Within a few months, the Soviets enacted the New Economic Policy (NEP), which restored the peasants' right to trade grain freely; agricultural recovery was swift.

But the course of the Chinese food crisis of 1959-60 had more in common with that in Stalin's Soviet Union during 1932-33, where forced collectivization led to a hidden famine that claimed an estimated 6-8 million victims.

In the Chinese case, the food crisis was shrouded in secrecy. Suspicions of a major Chinese famine seemed outlandish, since abolition of famine had been one of the revolution's proudest achievements. Moreover, the Great Leap began under conditions of peace and rising production. Outside observers were misled by the 50% increase in China's grain exports during the Great Leap years. It was not until after Mao's death, two decades later, that the famine's extent became widely known outside China.

There is today in China no independent movement of workers and peasants who can convey to us their historic memory and assessment of this experience.

In preparing this article, I focused on sources that are sympathetic to the Chinese revolution and its achievements, avoiding those poisoned by anti-Communist bias. But even sympathetic writers report many barriers in reconstructing the course of events. One three-person team says that on their first field trip, a month of intensive interviewing did not get at any of what were later revealed to be the key facts in the history of the village under investigation.

The Great Leap's toll

In this challenging context, the Great Leap experience has become the focus of raging controversy between Mao's defenders and detractors. Typical is the disagreement over the number of famine deaths.

In the early 1980s, the Chinese government released demographic statistics pointing to 15 million famine-related deaths. Writers hostile to the People's Republic claim this is an understatement, offering estimates as high as 38 million.

Mao's supporters say all these estimates are unreliable and biased attempts to besmirch Mao's memory, but even they concede that a serious famine took place and that the death toll was high. Among them, Robert Weil concedes 15 million or more "excess deaths"; Mobo Gao puts the total at 8.3 million; William Hinton estimates a "demographic gap" of more than 13 million, including through a decline in the birth rate. (See "Sources," below.)

As Gao notes, "even the lowest estimate of several million deaths cannot gloss over the disaster."

Mao's defenders stress the enduring achievements of the People's Republic's early years, comparing them favourably with the ambiguous record of the recent period. They are on strong ground here.

While conceding the Great Leap's excesses, Mao's defenders argue that he was not personally responsible; other leaders and subordinates, they say, were mainly to blame. Even if that is true, it tells us nothing about the Great Leap policies as such.

Moreover, Mao's defenders have little to say regarding the function and structure of the newly formed people's communes. They leave unchallenged the analysis presented in a number of recent detailed studies of village life in the Great Leap period, such as those by Edward Friedman et al., Ralph Thaxton, and also Mobo Gao.

The Commune's central importance, these studies tell us, lay in transferring the organization of farm labour, the disposal of peasants' production, and the responsibility for feeding rural producers from the peasant family to an administration that was usually located outside the village and was not subject to its control.

So great was the prestige among the peasants of the government – their government – that this change was accepted with little resistance, and promises that it would bring peasant prosperity were greeted with enthusiasm. But the actual outcome was to allocate more food to the cities and to state officials and less to rural producers, depriving them of hard-won food security.

Peasants were forbidden not only from buying or selling grain but also from traditional handicraft sidelines like rope-making. Small plots for family cultivation were abolished. Food was provided by communal kitchens – indeed cooking at home was banned. In some cases, peasant homes were torn down (without compensation) and peasants camped out in tents in the fields. Field work extended to 12 hours a day. Peasants could no longer travel without permission.

Rations in the communal kitchens, generous at first, were progressively reduced to starvation levels. The commune became a trap: peasant families had lost access to traditional recourses to stave off a food emergency.

A massive campaign to collect scrap iron for rural blast furnaces turned into an assault on the rural household: even iron cooking utensils and door hinges were seized and fed to the furnaces, leaving doorways gaping empty in the wind. Tragically, the furnaces produced little that was usable, and most were soon abandoned.

Meanwhile, local officials faced pressure to exaggerate in reports on crop yields. Many of those who insisted on truthful reporting were punished. Aggressive state grain procurement left peasants with less than the minimum needed to assure subsistence.

“The end result of all this,” writes Mobo Gao, “was that the rural residents were left to starve.”

New inequalities

Even in crisis conditions, distribution of food was unequal. The grain ration in 1960-61 was 8 jin/month for peasants, 21 jin for factory workers, and 24 jin for party officials whose need was less because they did not carry out manual labour. (1 jin=500 grams) The state preached equality but in reality provided privileges to those with access to networks of influence and power. Scarce goods were distributed to officials according to rank, through a five-tier supply system.

The principle of equality was also violated by creation of a caste of pariahs in the villages, composed of so-called landlords, rich peasants, and rightists. The landlords and rich peasants

designation was based on landholdings long since swept away by the land reform. Outcast status was passed on to children.

An “anti-rightist” campaign, launched in 1957, targeted above all those who had complained about bureaucratic corruption or abuses. Millions were labelled rightists, in part because of government rewards to localities that placed more than 5% in that category. During the Great Leap, anyone who complained about government policy faced the danger of being hurled down into this stigmatized caste. Hundreds of thousands were sent to labour camps, where they were held for many years.

Reprisals against suspected dissidents included “public criticism,” in which suspects were subjected to verbal and physical abuse as a means of extraction admissions of guilt. Other punishments included withdrawal of food rations, beatings, and, in some cases, killings.

Do such reports represent exceptional cases? It is true that Ralph Thaxton’s study concerns a province, Henan, where the regional authorities’ extreme application of the Great Leap policies, originally lauded as a model, was later disavowed by the central government.

But available sources do not report any trace of open public discussion of Great Leap policies, either nationally or on the commune level. These sources do not report any instances during the Great Leap where peasants successfully overturned an abusive commune or village leadership, even in communes that held back reserves in their granaries during the worst of the famine.

Nor is there evidence of attempts by the central leadership to establish guidelines to protect working people against abuse of power, safeguard dissident voices, or guarantee of the right of working people to join together in advocating alternative policies.

The way the Great Leap ended gives us something of its extremist flavour. In 1961, peasants were granted “three freedoms” – to cultivate a small private plot of land, to cook in private homes, and to engage in petty trade. Other restrictions on peasant activity also eased. Meanwhile, China stopped its multi-million-ton grain exports and began importing grain in similar quantities.

Recovery was rapid. Robert Weil reports that life expectancy in 1962 was double the Great Leap level and higher than before the emergency. Food production picked up as well, although full recovery took many years.

Capitalist road

At the height of the Great Leap, in August 1959, Peng Shuzi, a Chinese communist forced into exile a decade earlier for his dissident views, termed the newly formed People’s Communes “an effective instrument in the hands of the CCP for exploiting and controlling the peasant.”

Peng believed that this “exploitation” was different from what we experience under capitalism: the intended beneficiary was not a private capitalist but the national economy from which those in power drew their privileges.

But for the peasantry the coercive transfer of wealth out of the hands of local producers had similarities to landlordism. And despite the egalitarian idealism that was so prominent at the Great Leap’s outset, the communes functioned in a manner similar to a capitalist factory – but

with no right to form a union or to change jobs. The Great Leap thus prefigured the exploitative system that emerged after Mao's death.

When the Chinese government ultimately pulled back from the most destructive policies of the Great Leap, it did not repudiate the hierarchy, privilege, and disregard for workers' democracy that characterized those years.

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

The setbacks in the Great Leap included not only the tragic famine but also the weakening of the ties between Chinese working people and the new state they had created. It marked a step on the road that led ultimately to the rise of a capitalist system of production in the People's Republic.

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Socialist Voice #320, April 25, 2009

Bolivia: National revolution and ‘communitarian socialism’

Introduction. *During the last two weeks, the Bolivian people have won two significant victories toward implementing their new constitution. On April 9, Evo Morales went on a hunger strike while thousands rallied in the streets to protest the refusal of the Opposition-dominated Senate to ratify constitutional provisions for new elections. A compromise was reached after five days of the strike, and the bill was passed.*

Following this event, federal police foiled a plot to murder Morales. Police broke in on a mercenary group who launched a 30-minute gun battle. Three of the right-wing plotters were killed and two arrested. State prosecutor Jorge Gutierrez issued a statement which said the terrorists included men of Croatian and Irish, Romanian, and Hungarian nationality, abetted by members of Bolivia’s “far right,” including a Bolivian who may have also held Hungarian and Croatian passports, and who fought in separatist movements during the Balkan wars.

This plot comes on the heels of events last September, when, prior to the overwhelming 61% vote on the new constitution, rioters seized state buildings in a battle that took eleven lives. At that time, Morales accused Gov. Ruben Costas of Santa Cruz, of fomenting anti-government violence. A United Nations report found Pres. Morales’ political opponents responsible.

At that time, Morales ejected the U.S. ambassador and Drug Enforcement Administration officials who had championed the opposition. He also claimed that the U.S. organized groups to assassinate him. Washington denies those charges.

As the following article from Green Left Weekly reports, the Bolivian struggle for indigenous democracy continues. — Suzanne Weiss

Bolivia: National revolution and ‘communitarian socialism’

By Federico Fuentes

The historic enactment of Bolivia’s new constitution that grants unprecedented rights to the country’s indigenous majority, approved by over 61% of the vote on January 25, represented the beginning of “communitarian socialism”, according to President Evo Morales.

This was not the first time Bolivia’s first indigenous president had raised the concept of “communitarian socialism”. In his April 2008 speech to the United Nations, Morales spoke of the need for “a communitarian socialism in harmony with Mother Earth”.

While Morales’s political party is officially known as Movement Towards Socialism–Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (MAS-IPSP), it was originally simply IPSP.

Blocked from registering itself as an electoral party, the IPSP took up the offer of the then-existing MAS party to use its registered name to run in elections.

While individual socialists were involved from the beginning with the IPSP, they were a tiny minority within a party that was formed as a “political instrument” of Bolivia’s largest peasant organisations.

Forged through the struggles of the coca growers and the other peasant organisations, against US military intervention and neoliberal policies, the MAS developed a strong anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal character.

As the social struggles intensified, and the MAS’s weight began to grow in the electoral sphere, this political instrument increasingly became an outlet for growing disillusionment with the corrupt traditional party system.

The election of Morales as president in 2005, with a historic 53.7% of the vote, consolidated the MAS as the leadership of a broad-based national liberation movement — in which the peasant and indigenous majority led urban and middle class sectors.

The dominant ideology was a militant indigenous nationalism, whose vision involves promoting the inclusion and empowerment of the indigenous majority.

Since being elected, the Morales government has focused on modernising the country, promoting industrialisation, increasing state intervention in the economy, promoting social and cultural inclusion, and a more democratic distribution of revenue from natural resources through various social programs.

A major achievement has been the successful drafting of a new constitution by an elected constituent assembly — with the draft adopted by referendum — to refound the nation on the basis of justice for the indigenous majority.

In early 2008, Morales began to develop some underlying principles of what “communitarian socialism” might entail, according to sources within and close to the MAS leadership.

Differences, and then the onslaught by the right-wing opposition against the government, put this discussion on the backburner.

However, the crushing defeat of the right-wing attempts to bring down the government in 2008 greatly weakened the power of the opposition.

In this context, the MAS-IPSP held its seventh national congress on January 10-12, where it approved the document “Communitarian socialism to liberate Bolivia from the colonial state”.

The document provides a picture of how the MAS views the current revolutionary process and its direction.

According to the document, quoted by the March 2 Opinion, the inauguration of the MAS government marked the beginning of a “democratic and cultural revolution” that “reflects, due to the nature of its historic subject (indigenous), a communitarian and socialist conception orientated towards surpassing capitalist relations of production”.

The MAS “is not proposing that we deny the possibility of utilising the institutions or mechanisms provided by bourgeois democracy”, but nonetheless seeks to “ideologically [prepare] our people for the path of the revolutionary struggle”.

“That is, a revolutionary has to utilise to the maximum effect the democratic institutions, not to consolidate them, but rather to unmask the essence of capitalist democracy and prepare the masses for the qualitative leap.

“With concrete political proposals that correctly interpret the mood of the oppressed people and correctly characterise the existing balance of social forces, it will be the people themselves who draw the conclusions and the people who will decide — if leadership exists, of course — the transformation of society via the revolutionary struggle.

“In conclusion, in determined conjunctures and not at all times, it is possible to utilise the democratic struggle to prepare for the revolutionary struggle.”

The document argued that in “a dependent [country] like ours, it is essential that the people and its vanguard accomplish and develop a series of bourgeois democratic tasks that have not been carried out by the bourgeoisie.

“All the experiences of the international revolutionary movement, above all in Latin America, have demonstrated that the socialist revolution can not be realised if the democratic and anti-imperialist banners are not raised.

“But neither can the democratic and anti-imperialist [tasks be] carried out to the end, if it is not through a socialist revolution.”

The goal of the “historic project” of the indigenous peoples and popular movements is “a social formation where large private property of the means of production will give way to communitarian social property; the political power of the ‘colonial-imperialist oligarchic bloc’ will be substituted by the revolutionary construction of a new power by the ‘indigenous nations, revolutionary classes and urban sector bloc’.”

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Ecosocialism – For a Society of Good Ancestors!

By Ian Angus

Ian Angus was a featured guest at the World at a Crossroads: Fighting for Socialism in the 21st Century conference, in Sydney Australia, April 10-12, 2009. The event, which drew 440 participants from more than 15 countries, was organized by Democratic Socialist Perspective, Resistance and Green Left Weekly. The following is Ian's talk to the plenary session on "Confronting the climate change crisis: an ecosocialist perspective." He has lightly edited the text for publication.

The world is getting hotter, and the main cause is greenhouse gas emissions produced by human activity. Enormous damage has already been done, and we will have to live with the consequences of past emissions for decades, perhaps even centuries. Unless we rapidly and drastically cut emissions, the existing damage will turn to catastrophe.

Anyone who denies that is either lying or somehow unaware of the huge mass of compelling scientific evidence.

Many publications regularly publish articles summarizing the scientific evidence and outlining the devastation that we face if action isn't taken quickly. I highly recommend *Green Left Weekly* as a continuing source. I'm not going to repeat what you've undoubtedly read there.

But I do want to draw your attention to an important recent development. Last month, more than 2500 climate scientists met in Copenhagen to discuss the state of scientific knowledge on this subject. And the one message that came through loud and clear was this: *it's much worse than we thought.*

What were called "worst case scenarios" two years ago by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change actually understated the problem. The final statement issued by the Copenhagen conference declared: "The worst-case IPCC scenario trajectories (or even worse) are being realized ..."

Nicholas Stern, author of the landmark 2006 study, *The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change* now says, "We underestimated the risks ... we underestimated the damage associated with the temperature increases ... and we underestimated the probability of temperature increases."

Seventeen years of failure – with one exception

Later this year, the world's governments will meet, again in Copenhagen, to try to reach a new post-Kyoto climate treaty. Will they meet the challenge of climate change that is much worse than expected?

The politicians' record does not inspire hope.

Seventeen years ago, in June 1992, 172 governments, including 108 heads of state, met at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

That meeting produced the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the first international agreement that aimed “to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a low enough level to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” In particular, the industrialized countries promised to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels.

Like the Kyoto Accord that followed it, that agreement was a failure. The world’s top politicians demonstrated their gross hypocrisy and their indifference to the future of humanity and nature by giving fine speeches and making promises – and then continuing with business as usual.

But there was one exception. In Rio one head of state spoke out strongly, and called for immediate emergency action – and then returned home to support the implementation of practical policies for sustainable, low-emission development.

That head of state was Fidel Castro.

Fidel began his brief remarks to the plenary session of the 1992 Earth Summit with a blunt description of the crisis: “An important biological species is in danger of disappearing due to the fast and progressive destruction of its natural living conditions: mankind. We have become aware of this problem when it is almost too late to stop it.”

He placed the blame for the crisis squarely on the imperialist countries, and he finished with a warning that emergency action was needed: “Tomorrow it will be too late to do what we should have done a long time ago.”

After the 1992 Earth Summit, only the Cubans acted on their promises and commitments.

In 1992 Cuba amended its constitution to recognize the importance of “sustainable economic and social development to make human life more rational and to ensure the survival, well-being and security of present and future generations.” The amended constitution obligates the provincial and municipal assemblies of People’s Power to implement and enforce environmental protections. And it says that “it is the duty of citizens to contribute to the protection of the waters, atmosphere, the conservation of the soil, flora, fauna and nature’s entire rich potential.”

The Cubans have adopted low-fertilizer agriculture, and encouraged urban farming to reduce the distances food has to travel. They have replaced all of their incandescent light bulbs with fluorescents, and distributed energy efficient rice cookers. They have stepped up reforestation, nearly doubling the island’s forested area, to 25% in 2006.

As a result of these and many other projects, in 2006 the World Wildlife Federation concluded that Cuba is the only country in the world that meets the criteria for sustainable development.

By contrast, the countries responsible for the great majority of greenhouse gas emissions followed one of two paths. Some gave lip service to cleaning up their acts, but in practice did little or nothing. Others denied that action was needed and so did little or nothing.

As a result we are now very close to the tomorrow that Fidel spoke of, the tomorrow when it is too late.

Why Cuba?

The World Wildlife Federation deserves credit for its honesty in reporting Cuba's achievements. But the WWF failed to address the next logical question. *Why was Cuba the exception? Why could a tiny island republic in the Caribbean do what no other country could do?*

And the next question after that is, why have the richest countries in the world not cut their emissions, not developed sustainable economies? Why, despite their enormous physical and scientific resources, has their performance actually gotten worse?

The first question, why Cuba could do it, was answered not long ago by Armando Choy, a leader of the Cuban revolution who has recently headed the drive to clean up Havana Bay. His explanation was very clear and compelling:

“This is possible because our system is socialist in character and commitment, and because the revolution's top leadership acts in the interests of the majority of humanity inhabiting planet earth – not on behalf of narrow individual interests, or even simply Cuba's national interests.”

General Choy's comments reminded me of a passage in *Capital*, a paragraph that all by itself refutes the claim that is sometimes made, that Marxism has nothing in common with ecology. Karl Marx wrote:

“Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations.”

I've never known any socialist organization to make this point explicitly, but Marx's words imply that one of the key objectives of socialism must be to build a society in which human beings work consciously to be *Good Ancestors*.

And that is what the Cubans are doing in practice.

The idea that we must act in the present to build a better world for the future, has been a theme of the Cuban revolutionary movement since Fidel's great 1953 speech, *History Will Absolve Me*. That commitment to future generations is central to what has justly been called the greening of the Cuban revolution.

The Cubans are committed, not just in words but in practice, to being *Good Ancestors*, not only to future Cubans, but to future generations around the globe.

Why not capitalism?

But what about the other side of the question? Why do we not see a similar commitment in the ruling classes of Australia, or Canada, or the United States?

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

contradict their words? Why do they seem determined, in practice, to leave their children and grandchildren a world of poisoned air and water, a world of floods and droughts and escalating climate disasters? Why have they repeatedly sabotaged international efforts to adopt even half-hearted measures to cut greenhouse gas emissions?

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

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

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

Capital has no conscience. Capital can’t be anyone’s ancestor because capital has no children. Capital has only one imperative: it has to grow.

The only reason for using money to buy stock, launch a corporation, build a factory or drill an oil well is to get more money back than you invested. That doesn’t always happen, of course – some investments fail to produce profits, and, as we are seeing today, periodically the entire system goes into freefall, wiping out jobs and livelihoods and destroying capital. But that doesn’t contradict the fact that the potential for profit, to make capital grow, is a defining feature of capitalism. Without it, the system would rapidly collapse.

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

A system of growth and waste

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

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

In *Capital*, Marx wrote that from a capitalist’s perspective, raw materials such as metals, minerals, coal, stone, etc. are “furnished by Nature gratis.” The wealth of nature doesn’t have to be paid for or replaced when it is used – it is there for the taking. If the capitalists had to pay the real cost of that replacing or restoring that wealth, their profits would fall drastically.

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

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

Kapp wrote that capitalism's claims of efficiency and productivity are: "nothing more than an institutionalized cover under which it is possible for private enterprise to shift part of the costs to the shoulders of others and to practice a form of large-scale spoliation which transcends everything the early socialists had in mind when they spoke of the exploitation of man by man."

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

How large is the problem? In 1998 the World Resources Institute conducted a major international study of the resource inputs used by corporations in major industrial countries – water, raw materials, fuel, and so on. Then they determined what happened to those inputs. They found that "One half to three quarters of annual resource inputs to industrial economies are returned to the environment as wastes within a year."

Similar numbers are reported by others. As you know, about a billion people live in hunger. And yet, as the head of the United Nations Environmental Program said recently, "Over half of the food produced today is either lost, wasted or discarded as a result of inefficiency in the human-managed food chain."

"Inefficiency" in this case means that there is no profit to be made by preventing food waste – so waste continues. In addition to exacerbating world hunger, capitalism's gross inefficiency poisons the land and water with food that is harvested but not used.

Capitalism's destructive DNA

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

But the earth is not infinite. The atmosphere and oceans and the forests are very large, but ultimately they are finite, limited resources – and capitalism is now pressing against those limits. The *2006 WWF Living Planet Report* concludes, "The Earth's regenerative capacity can no longer keep up with demand – people are turning resources into waste faster than nature can turn waste back into resources."

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

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

Greenhouse Gas Emissions are not unusual or exceptional. Pouring crap into the environment is a fundamental feature of capitalism, and it isn't going to stop so long as capitalism survives.

That's why "solutions" like carbon trading have failed so badly and will continue to fail: waste and pollution and ecological destruction are built into the system's DNA.

No matter how carefully the scheme is developed, no matter how many loopholes are identified and plugged, and no matter how sincere the implementers and administrators may be, capitalism's fundamental nature will always prevail.

We've seen that happen with Kyoto's Clean Development Mechanism, under which polluters in rich countries can avoid cutting their own emissions if they invest in equivalent emission-reducing projects in the Third World. A Stanford University study shows that two-thirds or more of the CDM emission reduction credits have not produced any reductions in pollution.

The entire system is based on what one observer says are "enough lies to make a sub-prime mortgage pusher blush."

CDM continues not because it is reducing emissions, but because there are profits to be made buying and selling credits. CDM is an attempt to trick the market into doing good in spite of itself, but capitalism's drive for profits wins every time.

Green ecocapitalists

One of the greatest weaknesses of the mainstream environmental movement has been its failure or refusal to identify capitalism as the root problem. Indeed, many of the world's Green Parties, including the one in Canada where I live, openly describe themselves as eco-capitalist, committed to maintaining the profit system.

Of course this puts them in a contradictory position when they face the reality of capitalist ecocide.

In Canada, as you may know, oil companies are engaged in what the British newspaper *The Independent* accurately called "The Biggest Environmental Crime in History," mining the Alberta Tar Sands. If it continues, it will ultimately destroy an area that is nearly twice as big as New South Wales, in order to produce oil by a process that generates three times as much greenhouse gas as normal oil production.

It is also destroying ecosystems, killing animals, fish and birds, and poisoning the drinking water used by Indigenous peoples in that area,

It's obvious that anyone who is serious about protecting the environment and stopping emissions should demand that the Tar Sands be shut down. But when I raised that in a talk not long ago in Vancouver, a Green Party candidate in the audience objected that would be irresponsible, because it would violate the oil companies' contract rights.

Evidently, for these ecocapitalists, "capitalism" takes precedence over "eco."

But as capitalist destruction accelerates, and as capitalist politicians continue to stall, or to introduce measures that only benefit the fossil fuel companies, we can expect that many of the most sincere and dedicated greens will begin to question the system itself, not just its worst results.

Greens moving left: Gus Speth

An important case in point, and, I hope, a harbinger of what's to come in green circles – is James Gustave Speth, who is now dean of the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

Gus Speth has spent most of his life trying to save the environment by working inside the system. He was a senior environmental advisor to US President Jimmy Carter, and later to Bill Clinton. In the 1990s he was Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Chair of the United Nations Development Group. *Time* magazine called him “the ultimate insider.”

Last year, after 40 years working inside the system, Speth published a book called *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Stability*. In it, he argues that working inside the system has failed – because the system itself is the cause of environmental destruction.

“My conclusion, after much searching and considerable reluctance, is that most environmental deterioration is a result of systemic failures of the capitalism that we have today ...

“Inherent in the dynamics of capitalism is a powerful drive to earn profits, invest them, innovate, and thus grow the economy, typically at exponential rates ...”

That's exactly correct – no Marxist could have said it better. Nor could we improve on Speth's summary of the factors that combine to make contemporary capitalism the enemy of ecology.

“An unquestioning society-wide commitment to economic growth at almost any cost; enormous investment in technologies designed with little regard for the environment; powerful corporate interests whose overriding objective is to grow by generating profit, including profit from avoiding the environmental costs they create; markets that systematically fail to recognize environmental costs unless corrected by government; government that is subservient to corporate interests and the growth imperative; rampant consumerism spurred by a worshipping of novelty and by sophisticated advertising; economic activity so large in scale that its impacts alter the fundamental biophysical operations of the planet; all combine to deliver an ever-growing world economy that is undermining the planet's ability to sustain life.”

Speth is not a Marxist. He still hopes that governments can reform and control capitalism, eliminating pollution. He's wrong about that, but his analysis of the problem is dead-on, and the fact that it comes from someone who has worked for so long inside the system makes his argument against capitalism credible and powerful.

The socialist movement should welcome and publicize this development, even though Speth and others like him, don't yet take their ideas to the necessary socialist conclusions.

Greens moving left: James Hansen

Similarly, we should be very encouraged that NASA's James Hansen, one of the world's most respected climate scientists, joined in the March 20 demonstration against a planned coal-fired electricity plant in Coventry, England. Hansen is another environmentalist who has worked inside the system for years.

He told the UK *Guardian* that people should first use the "democratic process" by which he means elections. He went on:

"What is frustrating people, me included, is that democratic action affects elections but what we get then from political leaders is greenwash.

"The democratic process is supposed to be one person one vote, but it turns out that money is talking louder than the votes. So, I'm not surprised that people are getting frustrated.

"I think that peaceful demonstration is not out of order, because we're running out of time."

In the same interview, Hansen expressed concern about the approach of the Obama administration:

"It's not clear what their intentions are yet, but if they are going to support cap and trade then unfortunately I think that will be another case of greenwash. It's going to take stronger action than that."

Like Speth, Hansen is not a socialist. But he condemns the most widely-promoted market-based "solution," and he calls for demonstrations and protests, so ecosocialists can and must view him as an ally.

Why ECOSocialism?

Which brings me to a question I've been asked many times, including during this visit to Australia. "Why ecosocialism?"

Why not just say 'socialism'? Marx and Engels were deeply concerned about humanity's relationship to nature, and what we would today call ecological ideas are deeply embedded in their writings. In the 1920s, there was a very influential ecology movement in the Soviet Union. So why do we need a new word?

All that is true. But it is also true that during the 20th century socialists forgot or ignored that tradition, supporting (and in some cases implementing) approaches to economic growth and development that were grossly harmful to the environment.

Socialist Voice recently published an interview in which Oswaldo Martinez, the president of the Economic Affairs Commission of Cuba's National Assembly addressed just that question. He said:

"The socialism practiced by the countries of the Socialist Camp replicated the development model of capitalism, in the sense that socialism was conceived as a quantitative result of growth in productive forces. It thus established a purely quantitative

competition with capitalism, and development consisted in achieving this without taking into account that the capitalist model of development is the structuring of a consumer society that is inconceivable for humanity as a whole.

“The planet would not survive. It is impossible to replicate the model of one car for each family, the model of the idyllic North American society, Hollywood etc. – absolutely impossible, and this cannot be the reality for the 250 million inhabitants of the United States, with a huge rearguard of poverty in the rest of the world.

“It is therefore necessary to come up with another model of development that is compatible with the environment and has a much more collective way of functioning.”

In my view, one good reason for using the word ‘ecosocialism’ is to signal a clear break with the practices that Martinez describes, practices were called socialist for seventy years. It is a way of saying that we aim not to create a society based on having more things, but on living better – not quantitative growth, but *qualitative change*.

Another reason, just as important, is to signal loud and clear that we view ecology and climate change not as just as another stick to bash capitalism with, but as one of the principal problems facing humanity in this century.

Evo Morales: Save the planet from capitalism

Although he has never used the word, so far as I know, one of the strongest defenders of ecosocialist ideas in the world today is Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia, the first indigenous head of state in Latin America.

In a short essay published last November, Evo brilliantly defined the problem, named the villain, and posed the alternative.

“Competition and the thirst for profit without limits of the capitalist system are destroying the planet. Under Capitalism we are not human beings but consumers. Under Capitalism, Mother Earth does not exist, instead there are raw materials. Capitalism is the source of the asymmetries and imbalances in the world. It generates luxury, ostentation and waste for a few, while millions in the world die from hunger in the world.

“In the hands of capitalism everything becomes a commodity: the water, the soil, the human genome, the ancestral cultures, justice, ethics, death ... and life itself. Everything, absolutely everything, can be bought and sold and under capitalism. And even “climate change” itself has become a business.

“Climate change” has placed all humankind before a great choice: to continue in the ways of capitalism and death, or to start down the path of harmony with nature and respect for life.”

You know, last year I spent months working with other members of the Ecosocialist International Network, composing a statement to be distributed at the World Social Forum. It was finally published as the Belem Ecosocialist Declaration.

Now I wonder why we didn't just publish this statement by comrade Evo Morales. He set out the case for ecosocialism, including a program of 20 demands, more concisely, more clearly, and vastly more eloquently than we did. I urge you to read it and to distribute it as widely as possible.

Slamming on the brakes

Writing in the 1930s when Nazi barbarism was in the rise, the Marxist philosopher and literary critic Walter Benjamin said:

“Marx says that revolutions are the locomotives of world history. But the situation may be quite different. Perhaps revolutions are not the train ride, but the human race grabbing for the emergency brake.”

That's a powerful and profound metaphor. Capitalism has been so destructive, and taken us so far down the road to catastrophe, that one of the first tasks facing a socialist government will be to slam on the brakes.

The only choice, the only way forward, is ecosocialism, which I suggest can be defined simply as a socialism that will give top priority to the restoration of ecosystems that capitalism has destroyed, to the reestablishment of agriculture and industry on ecologically sound principles, and to mending what Marx called the metabolic rift, the destructive divide that capitalism has created between humanity and nature.

The fate of the ecological struggle is closely tied to the fortunes of the class struggle as a whole. The long neo-liberal drive to weaken the movements of working people also undermined ecological resistance, isolating it, pushing its leaders and organizations to the right.

But today neo-liberalism is discredited. Its financial and economic structures are in shambles. There is growing recognition that profound economic change is needed.

This is an historic opportunity for ecological activists to join hands with workers, with indigenous activists, with anti-imperialist movements here and around the world, to make ecological transformation a central feature of the economic change that is so clearly needed.

Together we can build a society of Good Ancestors, and cooperatively create a better world for future generations.

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

Thank you.

Ian Angus is editor of Climate and Capitalism, associate editor Socialist Voice, and a founding member of the Ecosocialist International Network..