

Contents

- 338. Left Refoundation: For new unity on an anti-sectarian basis
Rowland Keshena
- 339. Vancouver Socialist Forum Statement of Purpose
- 340. Venezuela: The best defence is to deepen the Revolution
Marea Socialista
- 341. Venezuela: Class struggle intensifies over battle for workers' control
Federico Fuentes
- 342. Honduras Coup: Template for a Hemispheric Assault on Democracy
Felipe Stuart Cournoyer
- 343. Climate Justice: Red is the New Green
Jeff White
- 344. ALBA, the English-Speaking Caribbean, and the Coup in Honduras
Faiz Ahmed
- 345. Two Accounts of Engels' Revolutionary Life
Ian Angus
- 346. Afghan Women's Rights Leader Says Foreign Troops Should Leave
Interview with Malalai Joya
- 347. Political Crisis, Economic Crisis: Challenges for the Radical Left
Alex Callinicos
- 348. 'Black Book' Exposes Canadian Imperialism
Suzanne Weiss

Socialist Voice #338, August 4, 2009

Left Refoundation: For new unity on an anti-sectarian basis

LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion.

This article is an excerpt from a statement by Rowland Keshena, an indigenous socialist activist in southwestern Ontario. It was published in his blog, *By Any Means Necessary*, which "aims to be a home for anyone who wants to change the current system of oppression and exploitation."

We encourage readers to read the full text, which includes much more on the author's background and experiences, and an excellent 10-point program entitled "What I Stand For." It is online here.

* * * * *

By Rowland Keshena

This is a (brief) statement of my background, belief and principles that I hope will help in bringing my readers closer to an understanding of what I want to see in the world and where I am

coming from. It is part autobiography, part statement of principles, and part FAQ. This statement is by no means the last word on anything, including my own thought, which is always evolving. Rather, what it represents is my best understanding at this point in time of the important issues facing revolutionary socialists in North America (the United States and Canada). So I present this to you as a work in progress, one that will always be changing, and will become more fully developed by both my own experiences with this blog and within the wider revolutionary left, and by the rich experience of people in a struggle for a better world.

Nearly 10 years ago now humanity entered a new era as it passed from the 20th century into the 21st. The world we live in has changed drastically in the last 10 years, making this one of the most challenging periods in the history of the international left. Near the end of the last century we saw the wiping away of almost all of the self-proclaimed “socialist governments” in Eastern Europe, and a spreading crisis of revolutionary movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As a result of the collapse of the already existing socialisms, we have seen the socialist project itself fall into a deep, world-wide crisis. However, despite these setbacks, we continue the struggle.

In this tumultuous period, many of the forces of the left around the world have made a marked retreat from their formerly revolutionary politics. However I believe that capitalism and imperialism threaten any hope for social justice, peace and human dignity. We now look out on a world-wide crisis of hunger, disease, environmental destruction, poverty and economic collapse. The system of global imperialism threatens the survival of all life on this planet. Nothing short of revolution can answer this threat.

I deeply feel that now more than ever is the time to build revolutionary organization; not only to rebuild the struggle for progressive social change in this country, but to conduct a “refoundation” of Marxist theory. The challenge is ours to apply the hard lessons that we have learned in the last decade to the body of Marxist knowledge; to build a wiser and better socialist movement that can carry us through to the next century.

How do I relate to other socialists?

Politically, there are four keystones of my identity. The first is my emphasis on national oppression, self-determination and white privilege, especially with regards to my own people’s struggle against North American settler-colonialism; the second is my commitment to an anti-sectarian socialism and the project of what is often called Left Regroupment/Refoundation; The third is my commitment to revolutionary socialism and the realization that ruling classes will never give up power simply because of mass protests or they lost an election; and finally my emphasis on anti-authoritarian socialism. While there are several groups in North America who positions are some combination of these, in my experience there is almost no groups that includes all four of them at the heart of its politics.

Also fundamental to me is support for the intersectional analysis of oppression between race, gender, sexuality and class. The core of this idea is that no one form of oppression operates independently. Each is impacted to a greater or lesser degree by the others. It is necessary to

remember that if we are truly to be(come) revolutionaries, we must learn how to organize all our oppressed to end all our oppressions.

Finally I have also placed a strong emphasis on indigenous feminism and combating patriarchy. What this has meant is that I firmly support the leadership of women and queer people in the movements I am active and work in. I am strongly opposed to all forms of socialism which take a mechanistic view of women's and queer oppression and believe that a socialist revolution and the establishing of working class hegemony will magically mean an end to patriarchy.

What do I mean by white privilege and national oppression?

I hold to the analysis that what is usually termed as racism is, in fact, actually an entire social structure of national oppression within North American society. The history of this continent, which was built on the graves of Native ways and beaten slaves, means that the US and Canada contains within their borders actual oppressed nations, or internal colonies. Present within both are the Native populations, the Indians, Métis and Inuit/Eskimo. In the U.S. there are additional internal colonies in the form of the Black and Chicana/o nations. The U.S. also colonially dominates the "commonwealth" (actually nation) of Puerto Rico. Similarly, what is often termed Anglo-Canada oppresses the Francophone Québécois nation. I hold that those nations have the right of self-determination, up to and including the right to secede and form separate countries if that is their wish. On the foundation of this national oppression, immigrants from oppressed or Third World nations and dark-skinned people generally are also subject to discrimination, state and vigilante violence and other forms of domination which we fight.

Further, I believe the historic weakness and low class consciousness of the U.S. and Canadian working class is principally due to the system of small, real and deadly privileges granted to those who have been defined as "white," even when they themselves are exploited workers. As renowned anti-racist Tim Wise states, this system was first intentionally promoted by the British settler elite in the 17th century, to divide and conquer rebellious indentured servants. Their strategy has remained at the heart of capitalist rule throughout US history. The system of privileges and the ideology of white supremacy have also taken on a life of its own, in institutions and in white people's hearts and minds. Any organization, any movement, which fails to tackle these issues in a determined and consistent way cannot hope to throw out the capitalists who rob and dehumanize all of us.

What is Left Refoundation?

I see the need for a powerful disciplined revolutionary organization, big enough, deeply rooted enough among the people, and well-coordinated enough to challenge the white supremacist US ruling class for power. But history has shown us that such an organization cannot be built in the "traditional" way: that is, by a small group of committed revolutionaries, which through its good organizing and correct political line, growing into a vanguard party. In the ever more complex society of North America, with some 340 million people across spread across its artificial border, that is not about to happen any time soon. Instead I believe that we need to conceive and develop an ongoing, long-range process. This process will involve many activists participating in joint projects and organizing at the local, regional and national levels. Interwoven with this is the

collaborative development of up-to-date theory and the discussion of program and strategy – core principles, key campaigns, short and long-term goals, methods of working together and visions of the society we want to build.

At the heart of such an approach is a commitment to anti-sectarianism, as such a process requires that the participants be willing to set aside many of their most cherished bottom lines in order to try and formulate a new unity. It will also require thinking through and struggling out some degree of unity about what lessons we have learned from our current organizing efforts, from earlier upsurges here in the US and from other revolutions and efforts to build socialism.

How does this differ from Left Regroupment/Unity?

The core difference between these two approaches is that unlike regroupment or left unity, Left Refoundation is not mainly a process about bringing together already existing self-identified socialist groups (or independent socialists). Even together, these forces are too small and too white, too old, too male and too middle-class. Refoundation calls for those who already believe in socialism to reach out and engage others active in diverse social movements of working and oppressed people. There's no blueprint for this, but we're trying to learn from examples of groups around the world who've tried similar things. That said, there is quite a bit of overlap between the two projects.

Socialist Voice #339, August 4, 2009

Vancouver Socialist Forum Statement of Purpose

Vancouver Socialist Forum was formed in 2007 by political activists from a variety of political backgrounds, to organize educational events on social justice issues and socialist theory and practice. VSF adopted the following statement of purpose on May 29, 2009.

* * * * *

Statement of Purpose, Vancouver Socialist Forum

Vancouver Socialist Forum was founded in 2007 to promote the ideas of socialism and facilitate the political activity of its members. It organizes educational discussions and regular public forums.

Socialism or barbarism

The economic crisis that engulfed the planet in 2008 once again illustrates the destructive and irrational nature of capitalism. To prevent worsening social and economic misery for the world's population, capitalism must be replaced by an entirely new economic and social order, socialism.

The goal of socialism is to create societies that offer full participation to each member and are environmentally sustainable. Human needs will be fulfilled through public and democratic ownership of the means of producing social wealth.

The world is also facing a climate change-driven environmental catastrophe of epic proportion. Oppressed countries and Indigenous peoples will be the main victims of this. Vancouver Socialist Forum (VSF) opposes the imposition of the costs of global environmental change onto them.

Consumption patterns in rich countries like Canada must change as part of learning a new relationship with planet Earth. This need not result in poverty for working people. What will be lost is the culture of consumerism, needless waste and excessive luxuries.

Only a mass, popular movement of resistance and change can end economic misery and reverse the destruction of the Earth's ecosystem. To achieve a shift to an ecologically sustainable and socially just economic order, planning of the world economy through democratic institutions and mass participation from members of society is required. This cannot be achieved under capitalism. The ruling elites resist any loosening of their control over the world's natural and human resources, while their lust for profits continues to drive destructive projects like the Alberta tar sands.

Internationalism, the right to self determination

Our watchword is internationalism. Working people of the world share common interests in fighting against capitalist exploitation and national oppression. Divisions among us along national or racial lines are fostered by the capitalists and serve their interests.

We oppose the imperial wars and occupations that are a permanent feature of 21st century capitalism. Canada is an imperialist country in its own right, a junior partner in the imperialist system of exploitation. We oppose the wars by Canada and its allies in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine; and the Canada/U.S./UN occupation of Haiti.

We identify with the revolutions in the Americas that have placed socialism back on the agenda, especially those in Bolivia, Cuba, and Venezuela.

We support the right of Indigenous nations around the world to political self-determination and sovereignty. We oppose the ongoing occupations of their territories, especially the Indigenous nations whose territories are occupied by the colonial-settler state known as Canada. We consider the struggle against Canadian nationalism and chauvinism and accompanying anti-native racism in the non-Native working class to be paramount in our work.

We support the struggles of the Quebecois against Anglo-Canadian discrimination, national oppression, and political domination. We support their struggle for political sovereignty and self-determination. We recognize the deep class divisions that characterize Quebec society and the interest of the ruling class there in promoting racism and bigotry against the Indigenous peoples and people of colour.

Fighting oppression

We recognize the particular oppression that women face and strive to tear down all barriers to full and complete social equality. Patriarchal constructions of gender must be challenged. We oppose all discrimination and oppression based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

We oppose the racism and discrimination against racialized people, including immigrants of colour, refugees, and 'non-status' people. We oppose the discrimination and violence against poor people by police agencies whose job is to keep the poor in their place. We support the democratic rights of poor people to public space and social support.

We recognize the special role played by the trade unions in the struggle for social justice. We participate in rank and file movements for greater union militancy and democracy. We advocate united fronts among all those fighting for justice.

Working people need to organize in politics independent of the capitalists and their political parties. Only independent political action and mass movements struggling for concrete goals can achieve lasting change. Elections alone change nothing.

How we organize

Membership of Vancouver Socialist Forum is open to those who agree with the general principles of its Statement of Purpose and who wish to promote socialist ideas and collaborate in political activities. Decisions of the group are made by majority vote at general meetings.

We seek to join in common activity with like-minded activists in other cities and provinces.

More information is available on the Vancouver Socialist Forum website.

Videos of VSF public forums. Thanks to the activists and volunteers at Pasifik Canada for putting these online

March 9, 2007: VSF's first public conference:

- John Riddell reports from Venezuela.
- Derrick O'Keefe speaks on Cuba.
- Adam Hanieh speaks on the struggle of the Palestinian people.

July 13, 2007: Barry Sheppard and Phil Cournoyer on the anti-Vietnam-war movement.

July 23, 2007: Phil Cournoyer on the current situation in Nicaragua.

November 16, 2007: Ian Angus on ecosocialism.

September 21, 2007. Peruvian Indigenous rights leader Hugo Blanco.

October 9, 2008: Panel on Canada's role in Afghanistan.

March 14, 2009. David McNally on the economic crisis.

April 30, 2009. Panel on the British Columbia provincial election and labour political action

Socialist Voice #340, August 6, 2009

Venezuela: The best defence is to deepen the Revolution

This editorial appears in the July 28 issue of Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide), a magazine published by an organized tendency of the same name within Venezuela's PSUV, the United Socialist Party headed by Hugo Chávez. It was translated by Richard Fidler for Life on the Left.

At this distance from the coup in Honduras it is clear that a new counter-offensive of Yankee imperialism – more aggressive, determined and coordinated than before – has begun in opposition to the process of the Latin American Revolution. And especially in opposition to the Bolivarian Revolution and the countries that are building ALBA, the anti-imperialist bad example that is moving ahead as an alternative model in Our America. With a capitalist system in crisis, and no foreseeable way out in the short or medium time frame. A triumph, even if only partial, of the Honduran masses will postpone for a time the decisive confrontations. It can slow down this counter-offensive, albeit not eliminate it.

The beachheads in this plan are: (1) the coup d'état in Honduras to consolidate a platform for action in Central America, together with the new right-wing government in Panamá, and to send a clear message to the rest of the continent; (2) converting Colombia into a huge base of occupation by US troops; and (3) ongoing counter-information operations to justify military actions.

The imperialist coordination with the local oligarchy is also obvious. The “democratic” plan to advance by way of elections, conceived by a sector of the local right-wing, goes hand in hand with the military pressure, the media war and a political and economic erosion of the process. Pincers designed for fascism, to weaken the process and crush it. Faced with this scenario, the model of a peaceful and gradual advance in the political and social transformations once again comes face to face with the “whip of the counterrevolution.” The Revolution, to survive, must deepen. It must “demolish the old structures of the bourgeois state and create the new structures of the proletarian, the Bolivarian state” (Hugo Chávez, July 25, 2009). And, let us add, go deeper still, in conjunction with ALBA and Our America, on the road of the international struggle for socialism.

The internal enemy, which nests in the entrails of the process, is no less dangerous. To advance in the deepening of the revolution, it is necessary to put an end to the bureaucratism that is demoralizing the revolutionary people like the corruption that is one of its more odious manifestations. For example, there is now an open fight in Guayana between the workers in the basic enterprises and some of the executives that manage them. The latter are resisting, engaging in various types of manoeuvres to block the development of the Guayana Socialist Plan drawn up by the workers in their own consultations. And, of equal importance, President Chávez, a few days ago in the midst of a VTV news bulletin, came out in support of the Socialist Plan. In the electrical industry, amidst the discussion on the collective agreement, the workers are demanding participation in the management of the Corporation Eléctrica and the management is resisting.

In the previous edition of *Marea Socialista*, we described the salient characteristics of this bureaucracy. We noted how it could be identified in its political, economic and military representations. And we pointed to the need for ideological debate, putting forward in opposition to it proposals laid out in an alternative socialist program for which we can fight. This is a task that cannot be postponed. Every revolution has a conservative, reactionary sector that defends privileges built on the basis of its bureaucratic function.

These proposals could be synthesized in institutional policy – deepening the revolutionary organization of the working people: the workers’ councils, the people’s councils, the communes, etc. And the construction of a great National Council of workers and the revolutionary people, their social organizations, with powers to plan, determine priorities and carry them out. That is, create a revolutionary organ that, together with President Chávez, debates and implements the central plan that is democratically determined by the rank and file.

In the economic terrain: the need to take measures directed toward the socialization of the means of communication and the nationalization of all basic and strategic industry. Not only against Globovision, but against all the media that place themselves above the law, actively participating in this imperialist counter-offensive. And not only the major industrial firms in Guayana, but all those that are strategic for our type of rentier economy: to move forward toward food sovereignty, the nationalization of all foreign trade and of credit and finance. At the same time, to advance toward a change in the relations of production, eliminating the social division of labour. To put an end to the capitalist, top-down scheme of governance and to stimulate the creativity of the mass movement in the management, control and planning of the economic units, and in their national articulation.

The issue is not simply what type of property these units have. Property is only the juridical expression of the relations of production. But likewise, it is essential to control the accounts of the private sector of the economy. Exorbitant earnings are impermissible for a parasitic bourgeoisie, essentially importers, devoting a major portion of the petroleum rent to supporting their own monarchical lifestyle.

In the military terrain: deepening the positive reforms that are being made, toward a true military revolution. Central to this revolution must be the democratization of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, to subordinate them to the new state that must be constructed, with the possibility of social control and supervision over them, breaking with their corporate character. But the most profound change, in the sense of defending the Revolution, is to accelerate, through the social movements, the construction of the Bolivarian National Militia. The genuine transformation in this aspect is the implementation of the slogan “people in arms”: the formation of battalions of the social movements. *Marea Socialista* opens its pages to assist in this fundamental task.

On the international terrain, it is necessary to draw the lesson of the coup in Honduras and the threat of activation of the bases in Colombia: to deepen the integration of the ALBA both militarily and in the coordination of the revolutionary social and political movements, to build the capacity for mobilization against and popular response to aggression. This is important over and beyond the neighbourly relationships and convenient commercial treaties and political

agreements that are possible with governments that have not chosen the road of independence, like Brazil or Argentina.

A major aspect of the political life of the next few months is the Congress of the PSUV, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. It opens a unique opportunity to carry out this debate. It would be tragic if the Revolution were to lose this opportunity. This is an historic moment. The history of revolutions demonstrates that it is precisely in the midst of the process that the greatest advances are possible in developing the shape of the new society, in the revision of the present one, in the rectification of errors. Hundreds of thousands, a genuine revolutionary mass, must be involved in this process. This participation is necessary for the strengthening of the vanguard of the revolution.

Related Reading: “Venezuela: Class struggle intensifies over battle for workers’ control”

Socialist Voice #341, August 6, 2009.

Venezuela: Class struggle intensifies over battle for workers' control

By Federico Fuentes

Green Left Weekly, July 29, 2009

(Caracas) On July 22, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez again declared his complete support for the proposal by industrial workers for a new model of production based on workers' control. This push from Chavez, part of the socialist revolution, aims at transforming Venezuela's basic industry. However, it faces resistance from within the state bureaucracy and the revolutionary movement.

Presenting his government's "Plan Socialist Guayana 2009-2019," Chavez said the state-owned companies in basic industry have to be transformed into "socialist companies."

The plan was the result of several weeks of intense discussion among revolutionary workers from the Venezuelan Corporation of Guayana (CVG). The CVG includes 15 state-owned companies in the industrial Guayana region involved in steel, iron ore, mineral and aluminum production.

The workers' roundtables were established after a May 21 workshop, where industrial workers raised radical proposals for the socialist transformation of basic industry. Chavez addressed the workshop in support of many of the proposals.

Events between the May 21 workshop and Chavez's July 22 announcement reveal much of the nature of the class struggle inside revolutionary Venezuela.

Chavez's announcement is part of an offensive launched after the revolutionary forces won the February 15 referendum on the back of a big organizational push that involved hundreds of thousands of people in the campaign. The vote was to amend the constitution to allow elected officials to stand for re-election – allowing Chavez, the undisputed leader of the Venezuelan revolution, to stand for president in 2012.

With oil revenue dropping due to the global economic crisis, the government is using this new position of strength to tackle corruption and bureaucracy, while increasing state control over strategic economic sectors. This aims to ensure the poor are not made to pay for the crisis.

Workers' control

On May 21, Chavez publicly threw his lot in with the Guayana workers, announcing his government's granting of demands for better conditions in state-owned companies and the nationalization of a number of private companies whose workers were involved in industrial disputes.

"When the working class roars, the capitalists tremble," Chavez told the workers. To chants of "this is how you govern!," Chavez announced his agreement with a series of measures proposed by workers.

However, like an old train that begins to rattle loudly as it speeds up, more right-wing sectors within the revolutionary movement also began to tremble.

With each new attack against the political and economic power that the capitalist class still holds in Venezuela – and uses to destabilize the country – the revolution is also forced to confront internal enemies.

The radical measures announced at the May 21 workshop were the result of the workers discussion over the previous two days. Chavez called on workers to wage an all-out struggle against the “mafias” rife in the management of state companies. Chavez then designated planning minister Jorge Giordani and labour minister Maria Cristina Iglesias, who both played a key role in the workshop, to follow up these decisions by establishing a series of workers’ roundtables in the CVG industries.

The CVG complex is on the verge of collapse in large part due to the privatization push by pre-Chavez governments in the 1990s. State companies were run down in preparation to be sold off cheaply. In the Sidor steel plant, for example, the number of workers dropped from more than 30,000 to less than 15,000 before it was privatized in 1998.

Chavez’s 1998 election stopped further privatization. But the government has had to confront large-scale corruption within the CVG, continued deterioration of machinery and, more recently, the sharp drop in prices of aluminum and steel.

The plan drafted by workers and given to Chavez on June 9 raised the possibility of “converting the current structural crisis of capitalism” into “an opportunity” for workers to move forward in “the construction of socialism, by assuming in a direct manner, control over production of the basic companies in the region.”

The report set out nine strategic lines – including workers’ control of production; improvement of environmental and work conditions; and public auditing of companies and projects. Measures proposed include the election of managers and management restructuring; collective decision-making by workers and local communities; the creation of workers’ councils; and opening companies’ books. The measures aim to achieve “direct control of production without mediations by a bureaucratic structure.”

The report said such an experience of workers’ control would undoubtedly act as an example for workers in “companies in the public sector nationally, such as those linked to hydrocarbons or energy companies.”

Bureaucracy bites back

Sensing the danger such an example represents to its interests, bureaucratic sections within the revolutionary movement, as well as the US-backed counter-revolutionary opposition, moved quickly to try and stop this process.

A wave of strikes and protests were organized in the aluminum sector during June and July, taking advantage of workers’ disgruntlement with corrupt managers and payments owed. The protests were organized by union leaders from both the Socialist Bolivarian Force of Workers

(FSBT), a union current within the mass party led by Chavez, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), and those aligned with opposition parties such as Radical Cause.

Revolutionary workers from Guayana condemned the unholy alliance of bureaucratic union leaders and opposition political forces, which aimed to stifle the process initiated on May 21. This alliance was supported by Bolivar provincial governor, retired General Francisco Rangel Gomez, who called on the national government to negotiate directly with local unions.

Opinion pieces began to appear in the local press, calling on the government to once again make Rangel president of the CVG in order to bring “stability.”

The alliance between Rangel and union bureaucrats in Guayana is long running. Officially part of the Chavista camp, Rangel has long been accused of being corrupt and anti-worker. During his term as CVG president before becoming governor in 2004, Rangel built up a corrupt clientalist network with local union and business figures. He stacked CVG management with business partners and friends.

While on the negotiation commission to resolve the 15-month long dispute at Sidor, Rangel ordered the National Guard to fire on protesting Sidor workers.

Also on the commission was then-labour minister and former FSBT union leader from Guayana, Jose Ramon Rivero, who was similarly accused by Sidor workers of siding with management. He was also criticized for using his position as labour minister to build the FSBT’s bureaucratic powerbase by promoting “parallel unions” along factional lines and splitting the revolutionary union confederation, National Union of Workers (UNT).

In April last year, Chavez disbanded the Sidor negotiation commission and sent his vice-president, Ramon Carrizales, to resolve the dispute by re-nationalizing the steel plant.

Rivero was then sacked. Today, he works as the general secretary in Rangel’s governorship.

The forces behind Rivero and Rangel hoped not only to stifle the radical proposals from the May 21 workshop, but also remove basic industry minister Rodolfo Sanz. Sanz has moved to replace Rangel’s people with his own in the CVG management.

In the recent dispute, Sanz accused aluminum workers of being responsible for the crisis in that sector. He worked to undermine the proposals of the roundtable discussions.

After several days of negotiations union leaders – essentially sidelining the workers roundtables – Sanz agreed on July 20 not only to pay the workers what they were owed, but also to restructure the board of directors in the aluminium sector. Through this process, the radical proposals for restructuring the CVG appeared to have been pushed aside – which suited both Sanz and Rangel.

Revolutionary leadership

However, Chavez intervened with his July 22 announcement, which came after a meeting with key ministers and advisors involved in the May 21 socialist transformation workshop. Chavez said his government was committed to implement the recommendations of the “Plan Socialist Guayana,” placing himself clearly on the side of the workers.

He said the workers' proposals, embodied in the plan, would "guide all the new policies and concrete and specific measures that we are beginning to decide in order to consolidate a socialist platform in Guayana."

When a journalist directed her first question to Sanz regarding the plan, Chavez stepped in to respond, by-passing Sanz and handing the microphone over to Giordani, who many revolutionary workers identify as strongly committed to the process of socialist transformation.

Rangel, who had been at the May 21 workshop, was not at the July 22 meeting.

Socialism more than state ownership

Chavez also appeared to differentiate himself from other sectors within the revolutionary movement, such as those behind the "A Grain of Maize" daily column, whose authors are linked to a political current involving oil minister Rafael Ramirez. This current has recently been vocal in arguing that socialism simply entails state ownership and central planning from above – with minimum participation from workers.

For Chavez, state-owned companies "that continue to remain within the framework of state capitalism" have to be managed by their workers in order to become "socialist." The Plan Socialist Guayana is Venezuela's first example of real "democratic planning from below," Chavez added.

The battle in Guayana is not over. Workers from the Alcasa aluminum plant told Green Left Weekly that management at aluminum plants met on July 25 to continue the process of restructuring agreed to by Sanz and union leaders – in direct opposition to Chavez's statements.

Other fronts of intense class conflict have opened up. Various struggles have emerged involving different forces and interests in the electricity sector, as well as the still-emerging communes, which unite the grassroots communal councils, to name a few.

A central arena of struggle is the PSUV, which is in a process of restructuring ahead of its second congress in October.

But the battle in Guayana may be one of the most decisive as it involves the largest working-class population. This is in the context of a revolution whose weakest link has been the lack of a strong, organised revolutionary workers' movement.

Socialist Voice #42, August 10, 2009

Honduras Coup: Template for a Hemispheric Assault on Democracy

By Felipe Stuart Cournoyer

The people of Honduras have now suffered more than 40 days of military rule. The generals' June 28 coup, crudely packaged in constitutional guise, ousted the country's elected government and unleashed severe, targeted, and relentless repression.

The grassroots protests have matched the regime in endurance and outmatched it in political support within the country and internationally. Its scope and duration is unprecedented in Honduras history. Popular resistance is the main factor affecting the international forces attempting to shape the outcome of the governmental crisis. It weighs heavy on the minds of the coup's authors and their international backers.

As Eva Golinger has convincingly documented, the United States took part in conceiving, planning, and staging the coup. The U.S. ambassador in Tegucigalpa, Hugo Llorens, coordinates a team of high-ranking U.S. and Honduran military officials, and creatures from the old Bush administration, using the Soto Cano (Palmerola) U.S. air force base.

But when the army, machine guns blazing, assaulted President Zelaya's house, kidnapped him, and dumped him in Costa Rica – still in pajamas – their actions forged unprecedented unity in Latin America and the Caribbean against the coup regime, and enraged hundreds of thousands within the country.

Latin American unity

In the first days after the coup, it appeared that the whole world denounced the Honduran generals and their civilian front men. ALBA – the nine-nation Bolivarian alliance initiated by Venezuela and Cuba – took the initiative in uniting Latin American governments around a common stand. Nicaragua's capital, Managua, became the temporary capital of Our America. Many Latin American presidents knew only too-well that they could soon suffer Zelaya's fate.

Argentina's Cristina Fernandez devoted her entire speech to this theme at the OAS general assembly, which took a unanimous stand against the golpistas (coupsters). That was followed quickly by a UN General Assembly meeting, convened by its president Father Miguel d'Escoto (a veteran Nicaraguan Sandinista leader), which also passed a unanimous resolution repudiating the coup and recognizing Zelaya as the legitimate president of Honduras.

Faced with this reality, the U.S. government hastened to portray itself as a key opponent of the military take-over and a supporter of Zelaya's return. It was politically urgent for the Obama regime, not only in Latin America but domestically, to disclaim involvement in the coup.

There has been much speculation that Obama disagrees with his government's duplicitous policy on the coup, and of course that cannot not be excluded. But what counts for the people of

Honduras and their supporters is not Obama's possible private opinions but his government's actions. Its walk betrayed its pronouncements.

The U.S. has not acted to cut the legs out from under the coup regime. It could topple the coup with a five-minute phone call that included a few bottom-line dollar figures. Its words, as time has shown, were mainly those of deceit and of manipulation of different forces acting on the Honduran crisis.

Main aims of the coup

Washington staged the coup to promote a number of closely related aims:

- To strike a blow at the ALBA alliance, by taking out its assumed "weakest link" – Honduras and its member government headed by Zelaya.
- To prepare for an assault on revolutionary Venezuela, prefaced by the announcement of new U.S. military bases that will convert Colombia into a gigantic aircraft carrier and platform for staging hostile operations against ALBA countries, with Ecuador and Bolivia also high on the list.
- To "take back" Honduras, and again use it as a platform to strike out against leftwing presidencies and mass movements in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, and to demoralize and discourage grassroots support for those disobedient or defiant regimes.
- To test Latin America's turbulent waters for a revival of coup-making in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to use it as a laboratory for coup-making in 21st-Century conditions. This involves attempting to re-inspire and regroup rightwing political and military supporters across the hemisphere. It also tested where the powerful Catholic Church would stand. (A free Bible if you guess right!)
- To probe South America's "soft underbelly" – mainly Brazil and Chile – to see if they were amenable to a deal, or at least could be bribed into silence. The goal is to drive a wedge between the ALBA Alliance and so-called centre-left regimes (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Chile).

Since then, a lot of water has gone down the Rio Coco (between Honduras and Nicaragua).

The coup regime threatened to become a millstone around Washington's neck and hinder its renewed drive to find leverage and points of support, especially in South America. Hence Washington's efforts for plausible denial, and lack qualms about letting the golpistas hang out to dry if necessary.

Latin American unity is now being sorely tested by the provocative decision to place U.S. military air and naval bases in Colombia. While both Brazil and Chile have reluctantly bowed down with the argument the issue is a "sovereign" decision for Colombia, others like Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Cuba have denounced the move.

An effective resistance

Meanwhile, the Honduran resistance has had immense impact on the population, the regime, the national and regional economy, and international opinion. This outcome is horrifying the local ruling class and Washington.

The Honduran economy is in tatters. Import-export activity is down an estimated 60 per cent. Zelaya reported in a press conference in Mexico City that over 200 road barricades had been erected, most of them heavily repressed by the army in an attempt to keep produce moving. Public schools have not functioned since the coup because of teachers' strikes and student boycotts. Health workers have maintained a long strike, and many other work centres have been hit by shorter strikes and slowdowns.

The de facto government has been unable to meet payrolls, and the profits of the ten ruling families are starting to dry up. ADIDAS, NIKE, and GAP – flagships of the maquila sector – have urged the U.S. government to accelerate Zelaya's return because their products are not being exported, and they are losing millions. The crisis is also hitting Nicaraguan and El Salvadoran import-export enterprises that depend on the northern Honduran port of Cortés for commerce with the eastern and southern U.S. and Europe.

Yet despite stiff resistance and surprises on the international front, de facto President Roberto Micheletti's "government" has not collapsed. Its main weapon, aside from Catholic Church sermons and virtual monopoly control over media, has been targeted killings and arrests of unarmed protesters, who take nothing to their actions but conviction, courage, and picket signs. Disappearances and torture are selectively carried out, the right to free movement permanently violated, and curfews are often lengthened.

The regime has now moved to close down Globo Radio, the only station that has dared to oppose the coup, support Zelaya as the country's legitimate president, and give the resistance a voice. It is still on the air as of August 6, surrounded by hundreds of supporters as defense guards. If the regime hangs on, it will likely also close down TV Choluteca Sur (Channel 36/34) which works closely with Globo.

The Arias Plan

Costa Rican President Oscar Arias's plan for ending the coup and restoring "stability" to Honduras should be called the "Obama-Clinton-Lula Plan." Santiago O'Donnell, regular journalist for the Argentine Pagina 12, wrote on July 26 that the Arias Plan was traced out in a Moscow meeting between Lula and Obama. According to O'Donnell, "Lula wanted Zelaya to return and Obama wanted him not to remain in power. So they came to agreement: Zelaya would return but would not remain in power." The plan's evident, but unstated intent was to keep Zelaya from exercising any real power and block any possible return to office in the future. And, above all, to weaken the mass resistance movement. The two presidents met again at the G-8 summit in Italy.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton chose Arias, whose skills in serving imperialism won him a Nobel Peace prize, to host talks between the Zelaya government (in-exile) and the coup

leaders. He “mediated” in San José between representatives of “both sides.” With the OAS pushed out of the picture, the talks moved away from the demand for the immediate and unconditional return of Zelaya, to a framework of conditional and delayed return (and thus the conditioned and delayed retirement of the de facto regime).

The talks began as a means to delay Zelaya’s return and to buy time for the coup regime, in the hope it could stabilize its rule within the country. Zelaya accepted the Plan as a basis for discussion. But talks soon collapsed, because the coup regime categorically rejected Zelaya’s return . A second attempt by Arias failed for the same reason.

Zelaya then turned away from the Arias exercise and began again to refocus on building the resistance and on diplomatic outreach. His government in exile operates mainly on the Honduran-Nicaraguan border (Ocotal), and at the Honduran embassy in Managua.

Impact of resistance

Mass opposition resumed, inspired by Zelaya’s attempts to return via the Nicaraguan border, and by the effective work done by his wife (Xiamara Castro de Zelaya) within the country. This had its effect. Obama declared more pointedly that the coup regime had to accept Zelaya’s return through the San José-Arias path. Brazil and Mexico backed this stance, as did OAS General Secretary Insulza.

The coup regime continues to reject this course. On the heels of Obama’s statement, Jose Miguel Insulza, Oscar Arias, and Spanish vice-president Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega proposed sending an OAS ministerial-level delegation to Honduras to try to convince the military regime to accept Zelaya’s return, and perhaps try to extract more teeth from Zelaya. Coup leader Micheletti said he would accept such a delegation only if no ministers from ALBA countries were included. The mission, which will arrive on Aug 11 is made up of foreign ministers of Argentina, Mexico, Canada, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, accompanied by José Miguel Insulza of the OAS.

Meanwhile, Zelaya has agreed to major concessions. He has accepted the principle of a national unity government, whose main task would be to stabilize the country, get the economy moving again, restore services such as education and health, and organize the November national elections.

In essence, Zelaya’s team feels it has no choice but to accept a deal that will leave it weakened and hand-tied, in a government that includes major figures of the coup. The authors of the Arias Plan hope this would leave the ruling class and the army with significant leverage to politically defeat the mass movement and the Zelaya current in the coming elections. That is not certain.

In a press conference in Mexico during his state visit this week, Zelaya sent a message to Washington and other hemispheric governments – either golpismo (coup making) by the extreme right will be contained, or Latin America’s left-wing guerrillas will be reborn. He again asserted the people’s right to insurrection under conditions of military dictatorship.

To the grassroots

Anyone who leaves the mass movement out of their calculations may come up short. The resistance movement has emerged as a new force, much more sophisticated and powerful than before June 28. Activists have been through a particularly acute and brutal school of class struggle. The growing unity between mestizo, indigenous, and Afro-Honduran peoples augurs well. Their international ties are more varied and stronger than before.

The Zelaya current itself is not the same as it was before the coup. There is every possibility that the interim period, with or without Zelaya's return, can be used to mature and consolidate this movement and to build its capacity to take on the ruling class in the electoral process and the ongoing battle of for the hearts and minds of the great majority of the nation.

The next Day of Action is Aug 11, when marches from all over Honduras will converge on the industrial centre San Pedro Sula and the capital Tegucigalpa. Hondura's National Resistance Front has appealed for simultaneous solidarity protests around the world on that day.

The outcome depends, above all, on the ability of the grassroots to remain on guard and active in political struggle. Their activity will likely unfold under the twin banners of an election campaign and building support for convoking a Constituent Assembly.

Anti-imperialist fighters should focus on defending the mass movement and its leaders in Honduras, and the goal of continental unity of Our America against imperial domination.

The Honduran coup of June 28 was an imperial dress rehearsal, a test for the coup instigators and for all of Latin America. Above all, the coup is a school for the Honduran grassroots. No matter what short term twists and turns the contending forces may take, Hondurans will never be the same.

* * * * *

The author is a Canadian-born Nicaraguan citizen, who divides his time between the two countries. He is a member of the FSLN, and a contributing editor of Socialist Voice.

He wishes to acknowledge news analytical sources that inform this article, including Radio Globo (Honduras), Radio La Primerisima (Nicaragua), El19, Pagina 12 (Buenos Aires), La Jornada (Mexico, D.F.), Rebellion, Latin-American-Australian journalist Fred Fuentes (Green Left Weekly), Tortilla con Sal (Nicaragua), Via Campesina , Honduran Resists, and Rights Action.

Socialist Voice #343, August 17, 2009

Climate Justice: Red is the New Green

The Global Fight for Climate Justice:

Anticapitalist Responses to Global Warming and Environmental Destruction

edited by Ian Angus.

Resistance Books, London, 2009. 284 pages. C\$20/US\$18/£10

Reviewed by Jeff White

The fight for climate justice, as that phrase is used in the title of this new anthology, comprises struggles around a compendium of related environmental and social issues. All of these struggles arise out of capitalism's relentless assault on the natural resources of our planet and its exploitative systems of production and world trade.

The worldwide character of the growing environmental movement is reflected in the diverse list of contributors to the book. Australia and the U.K., with active climate justice movements, are well represented here, along with writers from France, Belgium, South Africa, USA, Canada, and Latin America. Several of these 46 works have been translated from other languages and appear in English for the first time in this volume.

Many of the articles, speeches, interviews and essays provide comprehensive descriptions and analyses of how capitalism has brought humanity to the brink of ecological destruction. Many also provide useful and practical perspectives for advancing the struggle further in an anticapitalist direction. Most of the book's contributors write or speak from an ecosocialist perspective.

A struggle for 'humanity and the planet'

The "Global South," where imperialism and neoliberal restructuring schemes have had their most devastating effects on the land and the people, is in the forefront of activism around climate change and social justice. This book quite fittingly reflects that reality. A section entitled "Voices From the Global South" presents the anticapitalist analysis and experience of some of the organized peasant and indigenous movements in South America and elsewhere who have been fighting for climate justice.

Peruvian Marxist and peasant leader Hugo Blanco calls for a return to the values and principles of indigenous culture and collectivist production modes. Evo Morales, the indigenous president of Bolivia, responds directly to the climate change crisis in a series of short statements that explicitly name the capitalist economic system, its wars, and its globalized financial and market systems as the culprits. He calls for an international movement to "defend life, defend humanity, and save the earth." Putting an end to the capitalist system is the first of his "Ten Commandments to Save the Earth".

The April 2009 declaration issued by Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela and the other member countries of the ALBA alliance at the Summit of the Americas appears in the book. "Capitalism is

destroying humanity and the planet,” it says. Here is its summary of ALBA’s alternative to capitalist destruction:

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 one that loots 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 short, a system that restores the human condition of our societies and peoples, rather than reducing them to simple consumers or commodities.

It’s a remarkable declaration, coming from a group of countries almost all of which are themselves essentially capitalist. This has to be seen as a reflection of the profound internal divisions and contradictions within these countries as they fight to free themselves from the destructive legacy of imperialist exploitation and neoliberal trade policies.

The Cuban revolution, which has led the way for the whole world in sustainable agriculture and other production, is represented in two brief messages by Fidel Castro – remarkably prescient addresses given 17 years ago at the Rio Earth Summit and 13 years ago at the World Food Summit in Rome – and two recent (2008) addresses by vice-presidents of the Cuban Council of State, placing the crisis of rising food prices in the context of neoliberal trade policies and calling for structural changes to the world’s food production system.

Exposing capitalism’s ecological bankruptcy

The book provides useful material to help activists counter reformist “greenwashing” policies and other false solutions. Joel Kovel provides a critique of “green economics”, as failing to contemplate the need to overthrow the rule of capital, while Sean Thompson extends this analysis to the capitalist response to the current financial crisis. Simon Butler demolishes the myth that “overpopulation” is a primary cause of environmental destruction. Nicole Colson looks at the production of “biofuels” and their negative impact on the world’s food supply, and concludes that they are no solution to global warming and the addiction to oil. John Bellamy Foster explains why there are no quick technological fixes that will allow capitalism to continue with business as usual.

Capitalism’s attempt to apply market solutions to arrest climate change – by turning carbon into a tradeable commodity – is the subject of several articles in Part 5, which is entitled “Privatizing the Atmosphere.”

Trade unionist Tony Kearns calls for labour activists to push their unions to take up environmental causes. Liam Mac Uaid provides a bullet-point list of ecosocialist demands that

should provide plenty of strategic inspiration for activists. And I've only mentioned about half of the contributors to this book.

In my opinion, the best part of the book is saved for last. The final 46 pages consist of a remarkable piece by Belgian ecosocialist Daniel Tanuro. Written in the form of forty theses, it draws together all the threads of ecosocialism into a coherent theoretical framework.

Ecosocialism: red is the new green

Tanuro begins by analyzing the ecological crisis as a global crisis of civilization itself, emphasizing the extreme urgency of climate change in particular. Locating the source of the crisis in capitalist modes of production, he reviews some of the futile and harmful responses thrown up by bourgeois governments – carbon emissions trading, nuclear power generation, agrofuel production, imposition of austerity measures and restriction of rights, etc. – and emphasizes the need for structural solutions that are absolutely inconsistent with the perpetuation of capitalist economic relations.

What Tanuro calls the “energy question” is, he says, central to the fundamental and necessary transition from capitalism to “solar communism” – a society free from fossil energy. This transition will be impossible without the active participation of the productive classes. Tanuro projects the building of a broad movement based on mass mobilization around specific demands that link environmental struggles with issues of war, poverty, women's rights, agrarian reform, water rights, food security, unemployment, aboriginal rights, globalization, health, and other social justice concerns.

Of particular interest is his reaffirmation of the usefulness of “single issue campaigns” to build mass mobilizations, on the model of the anti-war movements. I also like the way Tanuro proposes taking advantage of the legitimacy of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to “force governments to accept, at a minimum, the IPCC's most prudent recommendations” for emissions reductions, even though those recommendations are based on optimistic and conservative assumptions about the urgency of the climate crisis, and will probably turn out to be inadequate.

Tanuro draws a balance sheet on the ecological insights of Marx and the ecological shortcomings of the Marxist movements of the 20th century, concluding that “the integration of socialism and ecology is a fundamental precondition for the restoration of Marxism's revolutionary vitality,” and calling for a “cultural revolution” within the socialist movement. Socialists of the 21st century, he says, must be ecosocialists. Tanuro's theses provide the perspective needed for the movement to formulate demands around ecological and social justice issues that challenge the rule of capital and point the way to a new society in harmony with nature.

Canadian ecosocialist activist/writer Ian Angus has done a fine job of selecting and presenting the contents of this anthology, as well as writing and translating several of the items himself. He combines current and historical material from around the world, both theoretical and practical, and all of it is highly readable. The book fills a real need in the small but growing corpus of ecosocialist literature in English, by taking anticapitalist environmentalism out of academia and into the streets.

It's an important book, written by and for climate justice activists. I know I will be using it as a resource for years to come.

More about The Global Fight for Climate Justice, including two sample chapters and purchasing information, can be found on [Reading from the Left](#).

Socialist Voice #344, August 17, 2009

ALBA, the English-Speaking Caribbean, and the Coup in Honduras

by Faiz Ahmed

The military coup carried out by masked soldiers in the early hours of June 28 against the democratically elected President of Honduras, José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, was a bandit act with differing messages intended for different audiences.

One such audience is the oligarchical groupings throughout the hemisphere, who will be emboldened by Washington's tacit tolerance of the coup makers. Another audience is the Latin American leftist and popular governments, who are being told that their agendas can be trumped by non-democratic means.

And there is yet another audience: the predominantly English-speaking Caribbean governments who, like Zelaya, are far from ideologically opposed to capitalism, but are aware of their inability to improve the overall quality of life of their societies within capitalism's current configuration. As a result, many of these island governments are edging towards regional agreements based on principles antithetical to the capitalist system.

This is perhaps why English-speaking Caribbean nations account for ten of the eighteen countries participating in the Venezuelan-led regional agreement PetroCaribe. Launched in 2005, PetroCaribe enables Caribbean governments to purchase oil and natural gas on terms that allow for the financing of upwards of 60 percent of the costs over a twenty-five year period at interest rates close to one percent. Also included in the agreement are stipulations for member states to finance costs associated with building energy infrastructure projects such as refineries and fuel storage facilities, as well as costs of fertilizer purchases to increase food production.

These Caribbean countries typically have been grappling with debt-to-GDP ratios ranging between 50 percent to 150 percent for the better part of the past two decades. They are economically dependent on tourism and the export of a very narrow range of agricultural commodities and natural resources. They remain highly vulnerable to the affects of hurricanes, tropical storms, sea level rise, and climate change. As a result, this new ability to finance a large portion of their energy requirements creates much needed economic space to pursue domestic agendas which, among other objectives, include: creating national food security; repairing and maintaining physical infrastructure such as roadways and airports; and strengthening social services such as health-care and education. Or more simply, building some degree of self-sufficiency; albeit along a program that does not deviate from a capitalist approach to development.

The ability to more freely pursue their domestic agendas is the main reason why, over the past eighteen months, three English-speaking Caribbean states have developed a rather perspicacious outlook and become members of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA

– an acronym that also means “dawn”). In their view, the regional bloc is not oriented towards a competitive model that exploits weaknesses, but is instead an example of a cooperative model that creates space for states to cultivate some degree of self-sufficiency.

The coup against Zelaya, and the utterly illegal removal of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide five and a half years before that, and the short-lived coup d'état against Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez two years before that – all show that international capitalism cannot tolerate any domestic agenda which includes an objective of self-sufficiency. Added to this intolerance is capitalism's long standing fear of the threat of a good example.

Located in the Eastern Caribbean, the three English-speaking states of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines form one-third of the nine-member ALBA. In fact, these islands are also members of three other important regional blocs, namely: the fifteen-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the twelve-member Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), and the nine-member Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

All of these groupings, composed mainly of English-speaking Caribbean islands, have done much to create a unified and familiar relationship between its members. As such, the experiences of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines within ALBA will undoubtedly be watched by other islands in the region. Each of these islands have been trying to mitigate the myriad challenges facing them over the past two decades, yet are experiencing very little success, as demonstrated by their weakening economies, degrading environments, and alarmingly, declining social indicators such as mortality. By one measure, life expectancy in the English-speaking Caribbean has fallen by four years over the past decade.[1]

ALBA and the road to self-sufficiency

Alongside the commitment to facilitate cooperative development, ALBA's strength lays in its ability to locate member-states' weaknesses within capitalism, and devise projects to mitigate and overcome their challenges. This analytical quality has allowed for the emergence of a large number of projects organized under ALBA's four main institutions: the ALBA Oil Agreement, the Bank of ALBA, the ALBA Peoples' Trade Agreement, and the ALBA Cultural and Sport Initiative. The sometimes overlapping projects are in various stages of development and implementation, and are free to be utilized or ignored, at will, by any member state.

ALBA Oil Agreement

Modeled on the principles governing PetroCaribe, the ALBA Oil Agreement is a mechanism for member states to finance their oil purchases on a long-term, low-interest basis, of which a portion can be repaid in goods and services. For countries in the Caribbean, whose annual energy costs represent expenditures between 15 percent to 30 percent of their GDP's, the Agreement is quite attractive. Furthermore, and similar to what exists under PetroCaribe, infrastructure projects designed to facilitate or increase: oil delivery, oil storage capacity, and oil refining capabilities have been undertaken, all of which have the explicit goal of reducing the overall cost of each barrel of oil these countries import. Also within the ALBA Oil Agreement is a project

that sees 25 percent of every oil receipt accumulate in what has come to be known as the ALBA fund, which is designed to be loaned to member states to pursue social development projects.

Bank of ALBA

In line with the objectives of the ALBA fund, and quite likely because of its example, the Bank of ALBA was established in 2008 to offer member states access to capital to pursue social development projects. Although the Bank has a total capitalization of only a small fraction of the value of other regional multilateral lending institutions, it offers a far more egalitarian governance structure, exemplified by a rotating directorship among member states, and a decision making structure where each member has an equally weighted vote. Established under the shadow of the ongoing global food crisis, the Bank's first projects have been the establishment of a food-distribution company tasked with creating an efficient distribution network between member states, and a regional food-production fund meant to be allocated to member states to assist them with domestic agricultural initiatives. Both projects have an explicit goal of creating some degree of regional food security.

ALBA Peoples' Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP)

Devised to coordinate the trading of goods and services within the bloc, ALBA-TCP outlines the specific obligations in the form of actions to be taken by each participating member state. The actions stipulated in the agreement attempt to locate areas of need within each participating state and then to match these areas with goods and services available in partnering member states. The result is a series of bilateral agreements between every participating member state. To date, only Bolivia, Cuba, and Venezuela are active in ALBA-TCP.

ALBA Cultural and Sport Initiative

The ALBA Cultural and Sport Initiative takes the form of developing localized independent media outlets and cultivating cultural exchange through sport. However, the more developed of these initiatives is the ALBA Games project which has been held on a biannual basis since 2005 and is meant to facilitate competition and training among the hundreds of athletes from around the world who participate.

There are very good reasons to project that, left unmolested, ALBA has the potential to offer Caribbean states a space where self-sufficiency can be striven for. An appealing quality of ALBA and its sister initiatives such as PetroCaribe is that they do not have political strings attached to them. Countries are signing on because the regional arrangements primarily offer economic flexibility. Countries are able to follow development paths of their choosing, which in the Caribbean still seems to be a Keynesian-inspired form of state-capitalism. For most countries in the region, this means establishing a much greater degree of self-sufficiency, in the form of food security, social development, and economic growth.

In line with imperialism's sordid history, the reactionary forces in Honduras have demonstrated the lengths at which they are prepared to go to obstruct any goal of self-sufficiency that excludes

oligarchical domination. Though progressive, the government of Zelaya was not revolutionary, it was looking to better the lives of the people who elected it, and saw that ALBA was one mechanism by which it could fulfill this objective. This is precisely why the coup against the democratically elected government of Honduras is rightly being seen as a threat against the bloc, but it should also be seen as a threat against like minded governments throughout the region, who are slowly edging towards ALBA.

[1] Life expectancy estimates for the English-speaking Caribbean were taken from United Nations Human Development Reports. Taken in the aggregate, and when not weighted for size of population relative to the entire population of the English-speaking Caribbean, life expectancies in the region have fallen by roughly 6 months over the past decade. However, when the populations of these islands are assigned values based on their proportion to the entire population of the English-speaking Caribbean, we see that life expectancies have fallen by 4 years.

Faiz Ahmed is a doctoral student in sociology and focuses on the study of islands and the political economy of capitalist-led sustainable development plans. His masters thesis titled: An Examination of the Development Path Taken by Small Island Developing States can be downloaded here. A shorter version of this article was recently presented to the Coalición Venezuela Estamos Contigo / Venezuela We Are With You Coalition of Toronto.

Socialist Voice #345, August 24, 2009

Two Accounts of Engels' Revolutionary Life

Engels: A Revolutionary Life.

by John Green.

Artery Publications, 2008

Marx's General: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels.

by Tristram Hunt.

Macmillan/Metropolitan, 2009

Reviewed by Ian Angus

Most people on the left know that Friedrich Engels was co-author of the *Communist Manifesto* and Karl Marx's lifelong collaborator. But few of today's radicals know much more than that about the man who built barricades and fought a guerrilla war in Germany in the 1848-49 revolution, the indefatigable organizer who played a decisive role in building the Marxist current from a handful of exiles in the 1850s into the dominant trend in the international working class movement by the time of his death in 1895.

They can scarcely be blamed for their lack of knowledge: it hasn't been easy to learn about Engels' life. In the 110 years after he died, only two substantial biographies were published in English – by Gustav Mayer in 1936, and by W.O. Henderson in 1967 – and both have long been out of print.

So socialists can only be pleased by the arrival of two new biographies of Karl Marx's comrade, and indeed, these books have been warmly welcomed by socialist reviewers. However, our pleasure at the publication of two books on a neglected socialist leader should not blind us to the fact that neither is the comprehensive study that Engels really deserves.

Both are accounts of Engels' *life* – not his *life and ideas*. Each discusses aspects of his political views and briefly summarizes some of his major works, but neither does so in detail. That's a serious weakness in biographies of a man who, as Green writes, "enjoyed nothing more than a lively debate, the clash of ideas and argument."

We can hope that other writers will correct the balance, but for now these are the most accessible accounts we have of Engels' life. They cover similar ground, of course, but they differ in emphasis. Green focuses on Engels as a builder and leader of the revolutionary left, while Hunt stresses his personal life, particularly the personal and political sacrifices he made to support Marx.

Engels: A Revolutionary Life

All by itself, John Green's account of Engels' involvement in the 1848-49 revolutions in France and Germany make *Engels: A Revolutionary Life* worth reading. Anyone who thinks of Engels

only as a grey-bearded socialist elder will be surprised and inspired by this account of a twenty-something activist who put his life on the line for his ideas.

Green also describes Engels' role in building and guiding the international socialist movement in the last two decades of his life. From his home in London, Engels kept up a voluminous correspondence in multiple languages – he prided himself on always responding in the languages of his correspondents – answering questions, advising, and criticizing.

Green is critical of the role Marx and Engels played in debates in the workers movement, complaining of their “almost pathological resistance” to ideas other than their own.

“In their intolerance of differing approaches to creating the basis for a socialist society and their vituperative lashing of those who think differently, one can see the germ of the sectarian in-fighting, the dogmatism and intolerance of dissent that will plague communist movements of the twentieth century.”

And yet Green admits that what he calls their “perpetual cavilling and proffering of advice” to the German socialists did “persuade the party eventually to adopt many of their fundamental principles.” Obviously Marx and Engels were doing something right!

What Green fails to understand is that far from presaging the sectarianism of later grouplets, in most of these disputes Marx and Engels were arguing against the sectarians of their day. They were intolerant of those who tried to divert the workers' movement onto side roads and dead ends, and they argued strongly that “every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes.”

Green says that his goal was to “rescue the man Friedrich Engels from the suffocating embrace of academia and to remove the layers of clutter and detailed overload that have kept him hidden.” Despite its political limitations, *Engels: A Revolutionary Life* largely does that, providing a valuable portrait of a man who committed himself to the revolutionary cause in his early twenties and never looked back.

Marx's General

From a strictly political perspective, the strongest part of *Marx's General*, which was published in England as *The Frock-Coated Communist*, is its discussion of the philosophical debates in Germany in the early 1840s. Hunt's account of the intense intellectual ferment from which Marxism emerged is the clearest and most concise I've read.

But his main focus is “the rich contradiction and limitless sacrifice which marked [Engels'] long life” – in particular, the years from 1851 to 1869, when Engels was employed in his family's cotton business, doing work he hated intensely, in order to support Marx while the latter researched and wrote *Capital*. For nearly 19 years, Engels held his tongue in Manchester business circles during long working days, while meeting (and carousing) with socialists and other working class militants late into the night.

Hunt, it must be said, sees this as a greater contradiction than Engels himself did, but his account does illuminate just how committed Engels was to his and Marx's joint lifetime project.

Hunt's focus on Engels' personal life occasionally leads him into sensationalism. As a young man in France and Belgium, Engels wrote that he enjoyed the company of "grisettes," which Hunt inaccurately translates as "prostitutes." Grisettes were actually young working class women, mainly in the garment industry, who were active in bohemian and left circles. As in the 1960s, an open attitude towards sex was common in the European left in the 1840s, but only conservative prigs and prudes – people Engels detested – equated sexual freedom with prostitution.

Like Green, but with much greater indignation, Hunt repeats the often-told story that Marx had an illegitimate son in 1851, and that Engels pretended to be the father to protect Marx's marriage. Only a reader who goes to the sources cited in Hunt's footnotes will learn that the entire story is based on one letter written by an unreliable witness in 1898 – and that other evidence makes the story unlikely. (See <http://marxmyths.org/terrell-carver/article.htm>)

Fortunately, salacious gossip doesn't dominate *Marx's General*, which in total shows a very human and humane man who loved good companions, good food, good drink and great ideas – a man whose life gives the lie to reactionary claims that socialists are cheerless fanatics.

Engels versus Marx?

In the twentieth century, Engels was frequently accused of revising, watering down, or otherwise corrupting Marxism. Depending on which critic you read, Engels was guilty of being too Hegelian or not Hegelian enough, of excessive scientism or not understanding science, of responsibility for social-democratic electoralism or for Stalinist totalitarianism.

As Sebastiano Timpanaro wrote in 1970, it seems that radical academics always start by blaming Engels for the parts of Marxism they disagree with:

“In all of these operations, there is a need for somebody on whom everything which Marxists, at that particular moment, are asking to get rid of can be dumped... Marx turns out to be free of all these vices, provided one knows how to 'read' him. It was Engels who, in his zeal to simplify and vulgarize Marxism, contaminated it.” (*On Materialism*)

Since neither of the new biographies tries to provide a thorough account of Engels' ideas, it isn't surprising that neither deals in depth with such charges.

John Green is agnostic on the issue. He accurately describes the Marx-Engels relationship as “a close and long-term collaboration ... an apparently perfect symbiosis,” but promptly qualifies that by reporting that nevertheless “there are those who claim to recognise significant and far-reaching differences between the thinking of the two men.” He summarizes some critics' views, but doesn't evaluate their criticisms. Would Marx have agreed with what Engels wrote in his controversial *Dialectics of Nature*? Green just says “we can never know.”

Surprisingly, given that his main interest is Engels' personality and lifestyle, Tristram Hunt handles this issue much more decisively. He insists that *Anti-Dühring*, often singled out as proof that Engels misunderstood Marxism, is "the expression of authentic, mature Marxist opinion," and he ridicules the claim some have made that Marx remained silent about Engels' errors in order to keep his friendship:

"Whatever mechanical revisions happened to Marxism in the twentieth century, it is a misreading of the Marx-Engels relationship to suggest either that Engels knowingly corrupted Marxian theory or that Marx had such a fragile friendship with him that he (Karl Marx!) could not bear to express a disagreement. There is no evidence that Marx was ashamed or concerned about the nature of Engels' popularization of Marxism."

We'll have to wait for a comprehensive defense of Engels, but for now, this response is right on the mark.

Which 'life' to choose?

After decades in which there was no life of Engels in print in English, suddenly there are two, with different strengths. Neither is perfect, but both will help to move Engels out of Marx's shadow and into centre stage where he belongs.

Hunt is an effective writer whose portrait of Engels really brings the man to life. Still, Engels was above all a political thinker and activist, so Hunt's repeated dismissals of political disputes as pointless squabbling reveal a serious lack of sympathy with his subject. That's also reflected in his improbable conclusion that Engels would have supported Russia's Mensheviks against Lenin.

Green is much better on Engels' role as a revolutionary activist and movement builder, and he devotes more time to Engels' ideas, although not always insightfully. Unfortunately, his book is not as well written: the narrative jumps confusingly back and forth in time, and Green's decision to write entirely in the present tense is a constant distraction.

Both books were first published in England, but Hunt's book now has a U.S. publisher, so it should be available in North American bookstores. Both can be purchased from online booksellers.

Socialist Voice #346, August 24, 2009

Afghan Women's Rights Leader Says Foreign Troops Should Leave

Interview with Malalai Joya

Malalai Joya's book, Among Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of the Afghan Woman Who Dared to Speak Out, co-written with Canadian writer and antiwar activist Derrick O'Keefe, will be published in North America in October. Joya, who was elected to the Afghan Parliament in 2005, was subsequently expelled for opposing the war and President Hamid Karzai's government.

Canada's government has promised to ending its "combat mission" by 2011, but many ruling class policy makers want that decision to be revisited, so the publication of her book by Simon and Schuster is very timely.

A cross-Canada speaking tour for Joya is being organized for November 12 to 27: meetings have already been scheduled Victoria, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. She will also speak in a cities across the United States from October 26 to November 11.

The following interview with Joya was published in Green Left Weekly during her recent Australian speaking tour.

Afghanistan: 'The truth cannot be killed'

"The situation for women in Afghanistan today is like hell," Afghan feminist, pro-democracy activist and illegally suspended parliamentarian Malalai Joya tells *Green Left Weekly*.

For Joya, who is currently touring Australia to promote her political autobiography *Raising My Voice*, it is a familiar situation.

She grew up in refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan. She returned to Afghanistan in 1998 to engage in the extremely dangerous activity of conducting underground classes for girls. Female education was banned by the misogynist Taliban, then in power.

This makes her assessment of Afghanistan today, more than seven years after it was supposedly liberated by the US-led invasion, particularly damning.

Misogynist government

The invasion was carried out "in the name of human rights and women's rights." However, Joya said:

"The US has imposed the Northern Alliance fundamentalists on our people. They are the criminal mujaheddin from the 1992-96 civil war with the same mentality as the Taliban, but with suits and ties talking about democracy."

The mujaheddin combined violent and misogynist religious fundamentalism with violent and misogynist banditry, with mass rape their favoured military tactic. This made the civil war period as dark as the Taliban rule that followed.

“We do not have liberation,” Joya said.

“These Taliban were created by the US ... in the religious schools in Pakistan, with the support of Saudi Arabia, but the Northern Alliance is also the product of the US government.

“In the Cold War, they wasted lots of money on them as puppets, but they became like mice when the Taliban came to power. They just crept into their holes.

“But after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US again made them wolves -in the skin of lambs to deceive the world.

“The democratic parties are not able to publish magazines, they are underground.

“Today, under the eyes of thousands of US and other foreign soldiers, the main problem for women – and men – is security. The prominent case of Pervez Kambakhsh is enough to know about injustice in Afghanistan.”

Kambakhsh is a student who, in 2007, was arrested for downloading an article on women’s rights. “They put him in jail and announced he’ll be hanged,” Joya told GLW.

Protests in Afghanistan and worldwide resulted in a sentence of 20 years jail instead – “while criminals are free.”

Parliament of warlords

Joya’s reputation from her underground work during the Taliban’s rule enabled her to be elected to the Loya Jirga, the constituent assembly convoked by the occupation forces in 2003.

However, this assembly was dominated by appointed warlords and their lackies. Joya gained worldwide recognition for a speech at the Loya Jirga demanding these criminals be brought to justice.

“Unfortunately, there were some democrats there but they didn’t raise their voices. Of course, most people are afraid of these warlords and criminals.

“But I spoke because even if I am killed, the voice of the people telling the truth cannot be silenced.

“I was sure that democratic people would support me. Today I am alive because of people’s support. In Farah they attacked my house and my orphanage, but shopkeepers, people on the street, arrived and defended it.

“This support gives me responsibility, but also strength and hope. These 30 years in Afghanistan, we almost lost everything but we gained one thing which means a lot. Political knowledge and consciousness.

“Now the people know who is our enemy and who is our friend.”

The speech made her dangerous enemies. She has since suffered five assassination attempts.

Despite seeing both the burqa and guns as symbolizing oppression in Afghanistan, to stay alive Joya has to be disguised in a burqa and accompanied by armed supporters.

She never sleeps in the same house twice and goes long periods without seeing her family or husband.

Despite this, her sense of responsibility to the Afghan people has meant she has rejected the advice of foreign supporters to go into exile.

However, she is modest about her courage. “We have many Malalai Joyas in Afghanistan, nobody knows them. “The only difference between them and me is fame.”

Elected to parliament in 2005, she was barred in 2007 for “slandering” other parliamentarians. She had described the warlords as zoo animals.

In her book, she wryly comments that perhaps she was guilty of slandering zoo animals.

Since then, she has made regular trips overseas to tell the world the truth about her country. While calling for war criminals to be brought to justice, whether Taliban or aligned with the US-installed government of President Hamid Karzai, she is keen to stress that the Western media image of Afghans being backward, violent fundamentalists is false.

She cited her widespread support among ordinary Afghans, men as well as women.

Foreign troops must leave

When visiting the West, Joya is frequently asked whether a Western troop withdrawal would mean a further descent into civil war and allow the Taliban to return to power. She rejected this reasoning.

“This is what the media want to make people think,” she told GLW. “But what’s going on today is like civil war. People are squashed today between two enemies: an internal and an external enemy ...

“That’s why its better if the foreign troops leave as soon as possible. People are saying: we don’t expect anything good from you, just stop your wrongdoing.

“Bombs falling from the sky are killing our people. On the ground, the Northern Alliance and Taliban are killing our people. From both sides our people are the victims – especially women and children.”

She cited a May 4 US air-strike in her native Farah province.

“The mainstream media wants to throw dust in the eyes of the world. Over 150 people were killed. I spoke to a young woman who lost 20 members of her own family.

“This was a massacre. I was banned from giving a press conference. But the US government and media said only 20 were killed.

“Our people hate warlords, don’t support Karzai and his puppet government of war criminals and drug lords who now want to negotiate with the Taliban. Our people hate the Taliban.

“If the troops withdraw, then it is easier fight with one enemy. Now we are fighting with two enemies: occupation forces and these criminals.

“A superpower like Russia could not occupy our country, and the US, whose occupation is a war crime and a mockery of democracy, one day they will face the resistance of my people. Despite the lack of security, after the Farah massacre there were demonstrations in Farah and of students in Kabul – huge demonstrations of people from all provinces.

“No democratic party was behind them, people themselves went out.”

Joya called for solidarity from ordinary people in the occupying countries.

“No country can donate liberation to another country. It is our responsibility to bring values like democracy, human rights and women’s rights.

“But with this catastrophic situation we need the helping hand of democratic men and women throughout the world. We don’t want occupation.

“And the families [in the West] who’ve lost loved ones [in Afghanistan] should raise their voices against the wrong policies of their government as these troops are also victims of these policies. To those families I offer condolences ... but they must raise their voices against the wrong policies of your governments.

“For example, Australia has for seven years followed the US, sending millions of dollars and troops to the shed their blood.”

She was sceptical about the US-led occupying coalition’s stated war aims.

“In seven years the US has not destroyed the Taliban ... They just play a game of Tom and Jerry with these terrorists.

“They occupied Iraq because of oil, while they occupied Afghanistan for its geopolitical location. When they have military bases in Afghanistan it makes it easier to assert control against Iran, China, Russia, etc.

“That’s why they keep the situation dangerous, to have a reason to have troops stay longer in Afghanistan. It is just a drama, the War on Terror drama.

“If they catch Osama bin Laden or [Taliban leader] Mullah Omar then this game would be finished. But they don’t want that.”

She pointed out that the US forces kill five civilians for every Taliban they kill. She also said during the occupation, illegal narcotics production has risen by a staggering 4500%.

Aiding warlords

The West has spent US\$18 billion on development aid in Afghanistan since 2001. Joya told GLW why this has not prevented poverty from increasing: “Most NGOs are corrupt. Most of the money from the international community went into the pockets of NGO-lords, warlords, drug lords, officials and the donors themselves.”

On August 20, Karzai is up for re-election. He has chosen two notorious warlords, Mohammed Qasim Fahim and Karim Khalili, as his vice-presidential running mates.

While the Western media is describing the elections as a test for Afghan democracy, Joya is scathing.

“The elections are under the warlords, drug lords, awful corruption and the occupation forces. To talk about free elections is not only ridiculous, it has no legitimacy at all.

“Most of the candidates are discredited faces. At most, one puppet can be replaced with another puppet. It’s just for the US to deceive people around the world.

“There’s a saying that it’s not important who’s voting, but who’s counting. We have a proverb: same donkey, different saddle.”

Despite her country’s violent recent past, Joya remains optimistic about the ability of her people, in particular her generation, to bring change.

“We are the war generation. We saw nothing in our country but suffering, violence, rape ... and it’s still going on. We have a responsibility, the children of Afghanistan, like the children of Palestine, Iran and other war-torn countries.

“I hope that in Afghanistan it will happen like it is in Iran – young men and women in great mass mobilizations.

“Hopefully this fascist government in Iran will be destroyed and the same will happen one day in Afghanistan.”

Socialist Voice #347, August 28, 2009

Political Crisis, Economic Crisis: Challenges for the Radical Left

LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion. In this article, a central leader of Britain's Socialist Workers Party discusses the challenges facing the British left in face of the global economic crisis, the decline of the Labour Party, and the weakness of left wing parties across Europe.

by Alex Callinicos

(Socialist Review, July 2009)

Crises aren't made of whole cloth. They have multiple causes and are explosive precisely because they represent the coming together of the major contradictions in society.

Thus the political meltdown in Britain isn't just about a massive popular revulsion against what the media call the "political class." Its intensity arises from the way in which it has coincided with the global economic and financial crisis.

As Jonathan Raban writes of the parliamentary expenses scandal in the *London Review of Books*, "In another year or season, the story might have had less explosive force, but its publication last month was one of those miracles of timing that are as much a matter of luck as of design. With the recession deepening beneath its feet, jobs evaporating overnight, houses repossessed, retirement portfolios dwindling, the public was in a state of fury at fat cats and hungry for revenge."

What the scandal revealed was that MPs identify themselves not with their constituents but with the bankers. Compared to median earnings of just under £20,000 a year, an MP's annual salary of £64,766 is very good money. But the parliamentarians were looking up, not down – not just at the vast takings not just of investment bankers and private equity bosses, but even of top civil servants and journalists. They wanted their share of the hog-fest of neoliberal bubble capitalism.

Labour has suffered more than the Tories over the expenses scandal. There are at least three reasons for this.

The first is that Labour supporters still expected better of their MPs. No one is surprised that Tory grandees should claim for cleaning their moats or building servants' quarters. The residual traditions of working class solidarity in Labour ranks mean that its leading figures are held to a higher standard.

The second factor is Gordon Brown's astonishing ineptitude. If he had defenestrated Jacqui Smith and Hazel Blears early on in the scandal then he might have got some credit for trying to clean out the stables. As it was, Brown's cowardice and procrastination meant their eventual resignations – and the more calculated departure of James Purnell – almost brought him down.

David Cameron was, as usual, much faster on his feet, ostentatiously taking action to force out some of the worst malefactors.

Thirdly and most importantly, the expenses scandal has accelerated the decay of Labourism. This is a long-term process, dating back to well before the weakening of trade union organization in the 1980s. Since at least the 1960s the Labour leadership has increasingly detached the party from its roots in the organized working class, transforming it into an apparatus of professional politicians focused on waging media battles with the rival apparatus run by the Tories.

The decay of Labourism

This process speeded up under Tony Blair, who used the defeats workers suffered under Thatcher to gut inner-party democracy and embrace neoliberalism wholesale. Incidentally, Blair shouldn't be denied his share of the credit for popular disillusionment with official politics. After all, he lied his way into war with Iraq and, when this was exposed, rather than being booted out of 10 Downing Street and locked up for war crimes, was allowed to hang on to office for another four years. The spectacle of Blair today, posturing as the Palestinians' friend and accepting grand prizes for his good works, is a standing condemnation of the British political system.

But it's important to see that this dimension of the political crisis isn't a uniquely British affair. Labour's appalling 16 percent of the popular vote in the European parliamentary elections was matched by the centre-left social democratic French Socialist Party. More generally, the past decade has seen an astonishing reversal.

In the late 1990s the centre-left held office in the four biggest member states of the European Union – Germany, Britain, France and Italy. Today social democratic governments cling desperately to office in Britain and Spain after bad defeats in the European elections. Elsewhere, from France to Poland, the incumbent centre-right claimed victory – though in fact their score wasn't that impressive.

The *Financial Times'* Blairite columnist Philip Stephens gloated over the discomfiture of the left: "Pace the doomsayers who predicted imminent Armageddon, liberal market capitalism has survived... Predictions of a return to the 1930s have proved as misjudged as the reckless complacency of policymakers and economists during the boom years... In Europe the imagined crisis of capitalism has turned into an implosion rather than a resurgence in the fortunes of the ideological foes of the free market."

This is pretty silly, in more than one way. First, Stephens is joining in the hubbub of commentary announcing the end of the economic crisis. While economic prediction is always highly uncertain, he is very probably wrong.

In early June two eminently mainstream economists, Barry Eichengreen and Kevin O'Rourke, published a detailed statistical comparison between the present crisis and the Great Depression of the 1930s. This shows that "world industrial production continues to track closely the 1930s fall, with no clear signs of 'green shoots'" and that "world stock markets have rebounded a bit since

March, and world trade has stabilized, but these are still following paths far below the ones they followed in the Great Depression.” They conclude, “This is a Depression-sized event.”

What has happened is that the financial markets have got over the terrible fright they suffered with last autumn’s crash. They are now excited about evidence that the rate at which some big economies are shrinking has slowed down and that China’s growth rate is rising. This has led to intense speculation in commodities markets, which is pushing up the price of oil in particular. All of this looks more like another round of bubblenomics than the end of the crisis.

At some point the world economy will stop shrinking. But it is more likely than not that this will lead not to a new boom but to a prolonged period of stagnation. The crisis happened because of the way in which the US ruling class came to rely on letting the financial system rip to compensate for underlying low profitability. But now – for all the flurry of good news stories – the banks are bust. It is going to take a long time to fix the financial system. As the Keynesian economist Paul Krugman put it, “The risk for long stagnation is high... The idea that we sort of bounce along the bottom is all too easy to imagine.”

Secondly, only the most vulgar of Marxists would predict that a serious economic crisis necessarily favours the left. Everyone knows that Adolf Hitler was the main political beneficiary from the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the *Guardian* another Blairite columnist, Martin Kettle, offered a more sophisticated take: “As in the 1930s, recession has hurt the parties of the left rather than strengthened them, while benefiting a range of parties of the right. National paranoias have not sprung up again in the virulent form they did in the fascist era, any more than communism has, but they are prospering modestly in new ways. The frequently expressed hope, including by [David] Miliband, that the financial crisis ought to generate a ‘centre-left moment’ has proved elusive. If anything, this is a centre-right moment. The social market, with a dash of protectionism, is today’s winning formula.”

Both Stephens and Kettle offer the same cure. As the former puts it, “What was missing last week was a centre-left prospectus recognizing the benefits of globalization while promoting wider distribution of its opportunities.” Now who does that sound like? Kettle is more explicit, demanding that the centre-left “rediscover the instinct for creative adaptation that Blair taught it.” In other words, back to Blairism.

This is remarkably cheeky, given that it was Blairism that got us into this mess in the first place. The social democratic victories of the late 1990s were the historical moment of social liberalism. In other words, centre-left governments brought to office by popular revulsion against neoliberalism continued with free market policies.

Blair was brashest pursuing this political course, but Lionel Jospin’s Plural Left government in France privatized more between 1997 and 2002 than its six predecessors combined.

In Germany the Red-Green coalition that held office under Gerhard Schroder between 1998 and 2005 forced through Agenda 2010, which was designed to make labour markets more “flexible.” This helped German capitalism sharply to force down real wages. Even Brown’s apparent

conversion to Keynesianism in response to the economic crisis hasn't stopped him plodding on relentlessly with the program of privatizing public services that he inherited from Blair.

The advent of social liberalism is an important factor in the popular withdrawal from mainstream politics that is evident right across Europe (participation in the European elections fell to a record low of 43.24 percent). All the major parties embracing the neoliberal "pensée unique" (single thought) deprived voters of a genuine choice. The revulsion against economic and political elites has found expression in the referendums rejecting the European Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and the Lisbon Treaty in southern Ireland a year ago.

But social liberalism has also been a catastrophe for the social democratic parties themselves. Successive defeats have fragmented the French Socialist Party: in the European elections it lost votes both to the Front de Gauche, an alliance of breakaway Socialists and the Communist Party, and to the left Greens. The German Social Democratic Party, squeezed between the centre-right and the more radical challenge from Die Linke, saw its share of the vote fall to a historic low.

The historic parties of the Italian left have simply vanished from the political scene. In the Spanish state the Socialist Party under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, brought to office thanks to popular revulsion against the Iraq war, has used its efforts to dismantle the historical legacy of Francoism to give a left spin to its version of social liberalism. But the impact of the economic crisis, especially severe in Spain, seems to have hit the Zapatero government hard.

The great 'moving right' show

Social liberalism, in other words, is the disease, not the cure. Nowhere is that more evident than in its homeland – Britain. But what the decay of New Labour has produced is a political shift to the right that has set David Cameron firmly on the path to 10 Downing Street and has pitched two British Nazis into the European Parliament.

It's important not to overstate this shift. The British National Party's (BNP) vote actually fell in the two constituencies where it won seats. The Nazis got in thanks to massive abstentions by Labour voters.

One can certainly find in popular opinion ugly attitudes towards migrants and asylum seekers. These are fed by the mainstream parties – think, for example, of the odious remarks frequently made by Phil Woolas, minister of state for borders and immigration. And the disastrous decision of a section of the trade union bureaucracy, and even parts of the radical left, to embrace Brown's slogan "British jobs for British workers" has further reinforced anti-immigrant attitudes.

Nevertheless, there is very little sign of the kind of generalized shift to the right in British society that brought Thatcher to office 30 years ago. Cameron has modeled himself on Blair, using the same kind of soft media skills to reposition the Tories in the centre. And his victory in the next general election, even if highly probable, will be by default. Winning a 28 percent share of the vote in the European elections, barely up on the Tories' performance in the previous elections in 2004, is hardly evidence of an imminent landslide.

All the same, the left and the workers' movement had better get ready for a Tory government. Brown may stagger on till the autumn or even next spring, held in place by Peter Mandelson's dark arts and Labour MPs' fear of a wipe-out if a coup forced an earlier general election. But whenever the election comes it will almost certainly usher in the Tories.

And their government will be a nasty one, less out of ideological conviction than because of the expectations the City will place in it. The financial and political elites have convinced themselves that the government's massive borrowing to prevent economic collapse is creating an enormous fiscal crisis that can only be addressed through drastic cuts in public spending. Whichever party wins the next election it will be expected to act in the light of this judgment. The government's budget figures assume that, after taking into account inflation, debt repayment, and social-security payments and the like, departmental spending will fall by 7 percent between 2011 and 2014.

But the Tories are preparing enthusiastically for the task. George Osborne, Cameron's shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, has boasted to business leaders, "After three months in power we will be the most unpopular government since the war." According to the *Financial Times*, "Mr Osborne is indeed preparing for an eye-watering budget within weeks of a Tory election victory, imposing the cuts – and probable tax rises – he feels are necessary to rein in borrowing of £175 billion...a year. No wonder he expects to be unpopular."

Workers, in other words, must expect vicious attacks. But this is no reason to opt for the flipside of the idea that economic crisis always favours the left, and assume the worst. The experience both of the 1930s and the 1980s is that major recessions tend to polarize society politically. The Great Depression saw, not just the triumph of Hitler and Franco but, partly in response, great working class insurgencies – France in 1934 and 1936, the sit-down strikes in the US in the mid-1930s, the Spanish Revolution of 1936-7.

In the end the right won, but there was nothing inevitable about this, any more than there was about Thatcher's victory over the miners and other groups of workers in the 1980s. Because the crisis is not over, we can expect social and political polarisation and major struggles produced by the bosses' efforts to restore profitability.

There is absolutely nothing predetermined about the outcome of these conflicts. As Gramsci pointed out, in the kind of "organic crisis" with which we are now confronted, the ideological and political cohesion of the contending social forces and the quality of leadership they receive will be decisive: "A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them. These incessant and persistent efforts (since no social formation will ever admit that it has been superseded) form the terrain of the 'conjunctural', and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organize."

Challenge for the radical left

But, if we are brutally honest about our own strengths and weaknesses, it has to be admitted that the radical left is in pretty bad shape. Across Europe there emerged in the past decade a radical left that sought to offer a principled alternative to neoliberalism and war. Particularly in the wake of the giant anti-war demonstrations of 2002-4, it looked as if it was really going places.

Things are different today. The situation in Britain is particularly shaming. The net result of a decade's sustained efforts at socialist regroupment was that the two main fragments of Respect (once the most promising product of these efforts) – namely the Socialist Workers Party and the supporters of George Galloway and Salma Yaqoob – chose not to stand candidates in the European elections. A third fragment participated in the No2EU slate along with Bob Crow of the RMT and the Socialist Party, which got even fewer votes than the perennial Socialist Labour Party backed by the rump of the once mighty miners' union.

In Italy the picture is even grimmer, with none of the fragments of the old Communist Party succeeding in gaining a seat in the European Parliament. Even more striking were the disappointing results of three very different formations in which much higher hopes were placed – Die Linke in Germany, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) in France, and the ex-Eurocommunist Synaspismos and its far-left allies in Syriza in Greece.

Is there an objective explanation of this failure? The low level of popular participation in the European elections and the fact that they don't determine the fate of national governments – which still have the lion's share of power in the EU – no doubt makes them accident prone and peculiarly liable to become the vehicle of protest votes. This helps to explain the strong performance of UKIP in Britain in both 2004 and 2009.

But this kind of explanation doesn't seem satisfactory. Why should it be only the populist right that picks up protest votes? The anti-war movements and the social struggles of the past decade represent a significant popular constituency for the radical left.

Moreover, two countries bucked the trend. In Portugal the Left Bloc continued its steady electoral advance, winning 10 percent of the vote and three seats. And in southern Ireland Joe Higgins of the far-left Socialist Party became an MEP, while the People Before Profit coalition made an important breakthrough in Dublin's local elections. Southern Ireland experienced one of the biggest financial bubbles in the mid-2000s and is now suffering a brutal economic squeeze. Here at least the radical left was able to articulate some of the immense popular anger that this has provoked.

In France, where social resistance to the crisis has been particularly intense, the three fragments of the radical left – the Front de Gauche, the NPA, and Lutte Ouvrière – got around 12 percent of the vote between them. This isn't a bad combined result, but it would have been a lot more impressive had it been achieved by a single unified political force rather than by three rival slates.

What can only be described as the failure of the radical left in the European elections demands of its different sections the most serious and self-critical examination of their strategies. The diversity of the different political formations and their national situations means that there is no general recipe that can be offered.

At most one can say that what is required of us is two things. First, a determined effort to support and strengthen resistance to the effects of the crisis and to make it as focused and sustained as possible. Secondly, a readiness to practice the art of politics in the style of Lenin and Gramsci, which means combining a strong principled stance with the tactical flexibility and willingness to compromise necessary if we are to concentrate the maximum of forces against the common enemy and to seek to fracture its own ranks. Once again, Gramsci put it very well: “[Marxism] is not the instrument of government of the dominant groups in order to gain the consent and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even the unpleasant ones, and in avoiding the (impossible) deceptions of the upper class and – even more – their own.”

We are going to need these qualities very much here in Britain. In the first instance, we need to build the broadest possible unity in action to isolate and drive back the BNP. The wave of protests that greeted the election of Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons to the European Parliament was magnificent, but it was only the start of the sustained effort needed to build a mass movement that can start to reverse the Nazis’ advances.

But, secondly, we need to get our act together electorally. This requires, on the part of the different fragments of the radical left, an acknowledgement of our collective failure. This isn’t important for reasons of moral uplift, but because all the different currents need to recognize that they lack an electoral project of their own that can offer the needed alternative to New Labour. Only then can we begin to explore the possibilities of unity seriously. As long as we each harbour the illusion that we can make the breakthrough on our own, we are sunk.

The reason why, between about 2004 and 2006, Respect captured a real mood was that, amid the great anti-war mobilizations, it represented the coming together of very different political forces to try to build a more united left. That moment cannot now be recaptured, and all those involved need to learn the lessons of the experience of Respect’s rise and fall.

Any future project of left unity will no doubt take a very different form. Achieving it won’t be easy. We are divided by past conflicts and also by important political disagreements – for example over the strikes against foreign workers. But a more united radical left must happen. It would be simply criminal to allow the Tories and the fascist and populist right to benefit from the decrepitude of Labourism.

Socialist Voice #348, August 29, 2009

‘Black Book’ Exposes Canadian Imperialism

The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy.

by Yves Engler. Fernwood Publishing, 2009.

Reviewed by Suzanne Weiss

Yves Engler’s *Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* lays out the facts on Canada’s sinister role as a partner in world imperialist and colonial quests, and urges us to understand the consequences. He challenges the belief that Canada is a peacekeeping nation.

Engler tells us that he was first questioned Canada as a “peacekeeper” when it “helped overthrow the democratically elected Haitian government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004.” Since then he has researched and explained Canada’s world role in the belief that citizens “have a right and responsibility to know, debate, ultimately shape what is being done in our name around the world.”

Engler denies the claim – accepted by many in the Canadian left – that Canada’s policies are dictated by Washington. He argues compellingly that Canada is an “independent player with its own self-interest,” motivated by corporate investments abroad.

However, his proposals for change are unsatisfying. It is not sufficient to expose the reasons for oppression: we urgently need alternative proposals that reflect Canadians’ aspirations for liberation and human rights.

Canada’s world investment empire

Engler begins by examining Canada’s early days as an emerging imperialist state. Canadian banks began operations in the Caribbean in the 1880s, he tell us, and by 1926 operated 140 branches there. As of April 2008, they controlled the region’s three largest banks, with \$42 billion in assets.

Canadian corporations have a major stake in the region’s oil, natural gas, electricity, nickel, cable television, bauxite and gold. The primary industry, tourism, is exploited by Commonwealth Holiday Inns of Canada, CN Realty, and Air Canada – part-owner of Jamaica’s national airline. Gildan Active Wear’s notorious blank T-shirt factories in the Caribbean are the largest in the world. Such companies “wield significant political power inside Canada,” Engler says.

No less than 60 per cent of the world’s mining companies are based in Canada – profiting from tax rules “designed around the needs of the mining industry,” and a judicial system that bars legal suits against Canadian companies for their misdeeds abroad.

Even in Cuba, with which Canada has maintained commercial relations through a half-century of U.S. blockade, has been the target of extended Canadian spying operations on behalf of Washington, Engler says. In addition, Ottawa is today planning for a U.N. presence “after the Castro regime falls” for which “Haiti is regarded as a test case.”

Canada's Role in the "Responsibility to Protect"

It is "particularly in Haiti," Engler states, that Canada "reveals the extent to which it is prepared to act as an imperialist power." It played a central role in consolidating the international occupation, after the Canadian-supported coup against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, which resulted in the deaths of some 8,000 people in its first 22 months.

Canadian rulers no longer speak of "peacekeeping," Engler points out; Canada is now engaged in "policing" and the use of "military" power. However, the end result is the same. Canada intervenes to enforce the new doctrine of "responsibility to protect" in what they consider "failed states," such as Haiti. This "failure" is caused in large measure by the operations of imperialism as a world system, and promoted by the intervention of Canada and its allies. The "failed state" theory is a new version of the "white man's burden" – an arrogant presumption of the right to organize subject nations for the benefit of Canadian corporate interests.

One could add that we see a similar pattern in Honduras: Canada's refusal to condemn the recent coup contributes to a "failed state" scenario that could trigger an imperialist "responsibility to protect" through Haiti-style intervention.

Moreover, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) boasts of its training and "peacekeeping" activity in more than 140 countries around the world.

Roots of Canada's 'peacekeeping'

Canada's celebrated 1956 "peacekeeping" venture in Egypt, Engler says, aimed to resolve the quarrel between the U.S., Great Britain, and France over who would control the Middle East. Ten years later, Canada backed Israel's invasion of Egypt with warships to protect the Suez enterprise. Egypt's semi-official Al Ahram newspaper called Canada a "stooge of the Western powers who seeks to colonize the Arab world with Israel's help."

Engler is not alone in this analysis. Retired Major General Lewis MacKenzie recently told the University of Calgary *Gauntlet* that at the height of the cold war, Canada's priority was not peacekeeping, but protection of Western "ideals against communism." MacKenzie says that "the number one Canadian myth," that "we're a peacekeeping nation" is "bull crap." (March 19, 2009)

But we must go further. "Peacekeeping" is a code word that entails military operations to suppress conflicts that are deemed to threaten and disrupt the current world order and world-wide corporate interests.

Engler's *Black Book* documents Canada's military aid to the still continuing war on Iraq, including naval vessels and soldiers incorporated into U.S. and British fighting units. And in 2006, the Canada rulers ripped off its veil of peacekeeping and openly sent fighting contingents to Kandahar province.

Particularly valuable is Engler's extensive documentation of Canada's leading role in promoting the Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine, which has stolen the lands of the Palestinian majority and expelled masses of them from their homeland.

Canada was among the main sponsors of the colonial state of Israel in 1948, and remains among the most consistent backers of Israel's wars and of its terror tactics that strip Palestinians of political freedom and deny them their basic human rights. Here at home, the Canadian government is hostile to free speech for Palestinians and their supporters who wish to expose Israel's apartheid policies.

A vision of another Canada

Engler stresses that criticism of Canadian foreign policy must be accompanied by a proposed alternative. He makes constructive suggestions, such as Canada's withdrawal from NATO, and drastic reduction in Canada's armed forces.

But the centerpiece of his alternative is to encourage "the rule of law in international affairs." In Engler's view, "International treaties should be enforced.... Canada must ensure international law is applied equally to all."

Certainly it is often possible for victims of aggression to gain by appealing to international law. During the 1980s, for example, the International Court of Justice ordered the U.S. to pay reparations for damage done by its war against Nicaragua. (Washington, of course, never paid a penny).

But by and large, international law has been crafted by rich and powerful nations to protect their interests. The problem is not that international law is improperly applied, but that the entire world order underlying this law is based on domination and exploitation.

Among the treaties that Engler seeks to enforce, for example, are the "Free Trade" agreements so ruinous to Third World peoples. The present United Nations occupation of Haiti was considered "legal" – indeed, authorized by the United Nations itself who utilized troops from economically poor nations to subjugate Haiti. Some of the most outrageous violations of national sovereignty have been endorsed or justified in the name of international law – such as the United Nations endorsing U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Moreover, the imperialist powers use their control of the media to weave a web of lies disguising their actions as legal. When George Bush Jr. wanted to attack Iraq, for example, he presented this as legitimate self-defense against supposed "weapons of mass destruction (WMD)." This fooled enough people to open the road for war. Later, it was revealed that the WMD story was all a lie, but by then the damage had been done and countless thousands of Iraqis slaughtered.

Even at its best, international law is no textbook of humane behavior. It says nothing, for example, about sending doctors abroad to provide free health care and education to the world's most deprived peoples – as Cuba, so much poorer than Canada, does as a matter of elementary human responsibility.

The alternative of solidarity

Something more is needed than merely telling our governments to obey the law. The real alternative is very simple: a foreign policy based on human solidarity, not on monetary profits.

Such a policy is already being implemented by courageous peoples of Latin America who are challenging their imperialist masters. The Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), a nine-nation partnership initiated by Cuba and Venezuela, offers trade and mutual assistance based on cooperation not competition. ALBA does not favour any political agenda, but invites poor nations to take the road of national sovereignty and self-sufficiency.

The ALBA Bank gives member countries access to capital based on equality: there is no system of weighted voting.

ALBA country members can apply for loans for oil purchases on a sliding scale based on the price of oil. ALBA sponsors Petrocaribe, which provides discounted oil to 18 Caribbean nations.

ALBA's Telesur assists Latin American countries in developing independent media, and forging unity of the people against their foes.

Engler does not discuss ALBA. Yet surely its example stands as the most convincing alternative to the evils he denounces in Canadian foreign policy. Although it is not in the DNA of Canada's government to change its character, the activists that Engler addresses should know that such an alternative exists.

Ending Canadian colonialism

As a study limited to foreign policy, *The Black Book* does not focus sufficiently on the striking parallels between the Canadian government's treatment of impoverished peoples abroad and within its own borders. In fact Canada's imperialist role internationally and its treatment of oppressed peoples within its own borders are two faces of the same reality. Canadian "peacekeeping" actually began with the North West Mounted Police (now the RCMP) and military suppression of the Northwest Rebellion of the Indigenous and Métis in 1885.

Not only is Canada imperialist; it is also the product of settler-colonial conquest, Canadian imperialism is not just a foreign policy; it is a reflection internationally of the capitalist nature of the Canadian state, which was built on the conquest and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the First Nations.

The crimes of Canada foreign policy do not result from bad judgment; they flow from the requirements of Canadian capitalism.

Canadian mining investments here have the same objective as those abroad – to profit from the land and labour of dependent peoples. In Canada, this has meant usurping Indigenous peoples land, ravaging their health, and deepening their poverty. The resistance of Indigenous peoples to irresponsible mining profiteers in Canada is strikingly similar to that of their brothers and sisters in Central America, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.

Victims of corporate piracy in Canada need to ally with those suffering this devastation abroad. Indigenous peoples in Canada have been the most damaged, but other working people are also victimized.

A coalition of resisters to corporate rule, in Canada and abroad, can break the corporate grip on Canadian government policies, both foreign and domestic, and end Canadian colonialism once and for all.