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Socialist Voice #459, November 1, 2010

Ecuador and Venezuela: Danger South of the Border

by Paul Kellogg

It is not difficult to see that the events of September 30, in the Latin American country of Ecuador, amounted to an attempted right-wing coup d'état. Mass mobilizations in the streets and plazas of Quito (the capital) and other cities – in conjunction with action by sections of the armed forces which stayed loyal to the government – stopped the coup before the day was out. But those few hours highlighted, again, the deep dangers facing those fighting for progressive change in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Remarkably, the first task is to re-assert that in fact a coup attempt took place. In the wake of the failure of the coup, commentator after commentator was trying to minimize what happened. Peruvian “libertarian” Álvaro Vargas Llosa – darling of the World Economic Forum and outspoken critic of Che Guevara and the current governments of Bolivia and Venezuela – insists that it was not a coup just an “ill-advised, violent protest by the police against a law that cut their benefits.”[1]

Let us examine the facts. Rafael Correa is the democratically elected president of the country, re-elected in 2009 winning 51.99 per cent of votes cast, on a turnout of almost 75 per cent (in an electorate of more than 10 million people). His nearest rival – ex-president and oil company friend Lucio Gutierrez – received just 28.24 per cent of the vote.[2]

September 30 – thousands of police rebelled, taking control of several cities, shutting down roads and airports.[3] In the capital city, Quito, they took over their barracks. When President Correa, went to the main barracks to confront the policemen, he was attacked with tear gas and injured. He was allowed to go for treatment in a police hospital, but confined there for 12 hours until rescued – after a “fierce gun battle” (according to Atilio A. Boron)[4] which resulted in the death of two policemen (including the police sergeant protecting Correa), a soldier and a student.[5]

During these tense hours, there was a rebellion in sections of the armed forces (members of the Ecuadoran air force took over and shut down Quito's international airport)[6] and anti-Correa political figures – including the lawyer for defeated presidential candidate Gutierrez – tried to force their way into the buildings of Ecuador National Television.[7]

When the democratically-elected president of a country is attacked, injured and confined against his will: when police take over towns and sections of the air force take over and close the country's major airport: when pro-business political figures try to storm the national television station – that is called an attempted coup d'état. If it were to happen in Ottawa, Washington or London, there would be no dispute.

A photograph accompanying an important article by Mark Weisbrot (co-writer of Oliver Stone's *South of the Border*) showed masses of people taking to the streets of Quito to defend Correa. In the article, Weisbrot persuasively argued that “to anyone who watched the prolonged, pitched gun-battle on TV last night, when the armed forces finally rescued President Correa from the hospital where he was trapped by the police” this could only be seen as an attempted coup, “an attempt to overthrow the government.”[8]

The reason there is a bizarre attempt to pretend that this coup attempt never happened, is to hope that people won't ask who might have benefited from such an action. A quick examination of the actions of President Correa sheds considerable light on that.

- In 2006, working with President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Correa moved to increase state control over oil production in the country.[9]
- In 2008, he announced that Ecuador would not pay several billions of its more than \$10 billion foreign debt, calling it “illegitimate.”[10]
- In 2009, he refused to renew the lease of the U.S. military airbase in Manta, saying that “the only way the US could keep their military base in Ecuador, is if Ecuador were allowed to have one of its own in Florida.”[11]
- In 2009, he officially brought Ecuador into ALBA – the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas led by Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia.

When a country increases state control, challenges illegitimate foreign debt, pushes the U.S. military out of the country and joins a regional alliance with Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba – it is clear that the forces that would benefit from a coup would be: a) corporate interests inside Ecuador; b) international financial institutions; and c) the United States and its allies.

There is another reason why the right-wing, corporate elite and the imperialist countries might have an incentive to minimize what happened September 30. There is now a shamefully long list of recent coup attempts in Latin America and the Caribbean – four of them against members of ALBA.

- April 2002, President Chávez of Venezuela was briefly taken into exile in a coup d'état which was stopped when one million of his supporters surrounded the presidential palace.

- February 2004, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forcibly overthrown in a coup backed by the military forces of Canada, the United States and France.
- September 2008, in the Santa Cruz area of Bolivia, right-wing forces used armed fascist gangs to try and break the hold of President Evo Morales.[12] They were stopped through a combination of mass mobilizations, and the intervention by loyal sections of the armed forces.
- June 2009, Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was overthrown by the military.

All but Haiti were members of ALBA – and one of the main acts of the coup regime in Honduras was to withdraw from ALBA.

It is not, therefore, an exaggeration, to say that the coup attempt in Ecuador is the latest in a series of violent attempts to roll back the anti-neoliberal movement, whose main institutional shape is represented by the ALBA countries.

The dangers facing the anti-neoliberal movement, and the region, were also highlighted by the results of National Assembly elections in Venezuela. At one level, they represent a remarkable achievement – the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) topping the polls and winning 98 seats out of 165. But within that victory, there were troubling signs.

First while the PSUV won more than five million votes in both the nationwide vote for the Latin American parliament and the state-wide party lists, its right-wing rival, the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) also topped five million in both votes, trailing the PSUV by around 200,000.

Second – key states along the border of Colombia (the principle base for the U.S. military in the region) fell to the MUD.

Finally – while 98 seats is a majority, it is short of the two-thirds majority necessary for key constitutional changes. Important advances – such as creating a favourable legislative framework for workers' control of industry – will be much more difficult.[13]

There is disillusionment in sections of the base of the PSUV. The recession hit Venezuela harder than many other countries in Latin America. The old state bureaucracy is still largely intact (and quite reluctant to support Chávez's reforms), and the bulk of the media remains in the hands of the right-wing. In addition – while the PSUV has been a remarkable school in politics for millions of people – it has also been a source of career advancement for a few thousand. Nepotism and bureaucratic tendencies have become a drag on many of the reform projects launched by the regime.

In each of the ALBA countries, internal difficulties are immense, and in each there an array of positions which are often difficult for Global North observers properly to understand. In Ecuador, for instance, it wasn't just darlings of the right-wing like Álvaro Vargas Llosa who denied that the September 30 events were a coup. Unfortunately, Ecuador's important coalition of social movements, the Federation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) took the same position. "We energetically announce that there never was any attempted coup d'état, much less a kidnapping, but an event that responded to the uncertain political management of the

government that causes popular discontent through permanent aggression, discrimination and violations of human rights consecrated in the Constitution.”[14]

CONAIE’s importance in the social movements in Ecuador is not to be doubted. Its mobilization of the Indigenous community has been a key factor in the social advances made in Ecuador this century. And Correa has not always been an easy president to defend. In 2009, CONAIE was involved in a “week of marches and road blockades” in protest against certain of Correa’s policies. At issue were “the autonomy of the indigenous bilingual education system,” the new water law and the new mining law passed in January 2009 which CONAIE has “appealed before the Constitutional Court.”[15] But even with legitimate grievances against Correa, it is clearly a mistake for CONAIE to minimize the dangers represented by the September 30 events.

Global North solidarity activists need to be aware of internal conflicts in the ALBA countries, take them very seriously, and try to sort out our attitude towards them. But from a distance, that is not such an easy task. In very general terms, we can say that the way forward in all the ALBA countries will be found in popular mobilizations at the base. Political tendencies which base themselves on the developing organs of popular control, in the neighbourhoods and workplaces, are the only long-term alternative in all the ALBA countries. It is also very clear that no break from imperialism will be possible which is not deeply rooted in Indigenous sovereignty.

But we need to be absolutely clear, for us in the Global North, these are not the key issues. We won’t be the ones addressing and solving them. That task will of course fall to the workers and campesinos inside the ALBA countries themselves.

Our job is to know the importance of the push-back to imperialism represented by the ALBA countries and the grim seriousness of our states in their determination to reverse this process. Our job is to build solidarity with the ALBA countries against attacks from the United States and Canada. To the extent we can do that, we can modestly increase the space for the struggles against neoliberalism, unfolding in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This task is not easy. In Canada and the U.S., there is a virtual blanket of silence around the enormous movements against imperialism which have broken through in Latin America and the Caribbean. We need education to demonstrate the importance of the struggles in Latin America and the Caribbean. We need to encourage worker-to-worker and student-to-student exchange programs, so that we can see for ourselves the challenges and possibilities in Latin America and the Caribbean. All of this, done properly, will lay the basis for a bigger solidarity movement should there be a sixth coup d’état attempt in the months to come.

This is not an act of charity. It was the poor of Cochabamba in Bolivia who, ten years ago, rose up and defeated the privatization of water in their region – the first big victory against privatization in all the Americas. It was the masses of Latin America and the Caribbean who defeated the Free Trade Area of the Americas in 2005. It was the new government of Bolivia which convened the alternative conference on climate justice – again in Cochabamba – after the Global North failed miserably in Copenhagen.

In every sense of the word, their struggle is our struggle.

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Socialist Voice #459, November 1, 2010

International Left Debates Cuba's New Economic Measures

by **Richard Fidler**

This issue of *Socialist Voice* draws attention to further commentaries on the implications of the sweeping economic and social measures announced by the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) on September 13. We publish here excerpts from and links to articles by Jorge Martin, the international secretary of Hands Off Venezuela; Frank Josué Solar Cabrales, a social sciences professor in Santiago de Cuba; Helen Yaffe, a scholar in Britain who specializes in Cuba's revolutionary history; and Ike Nahem, a leading activist in Cuba solidarity work in New York City.

The CTC statement was initially published on the back page of that day's issue of *Granma*, the official Cuban CP daily newspaper. An unofficial English translation is available. Detailed regulations governing the implementation of the decision have now been published in the Official Gazette (Spanish only). See issues no. 11, 12 and 13 (labelled "Extraordinaria Especial").

Jorge Martin's article, "Where Is Cuba Going? Towards Capitalism or Socialism?" provides some detailed information on the measures and outlines some of the major economic problems confronting Cuba today as a result of the world capitalist recession. He concludes:

"A gulf will open up between the private and public sectors. In a situation where the state is not able to produce good quality industrial and manufactured goods, the private sector will tend to grow at the expense of the state sector. In other words, the capitalist elements will grow and the socialist elements will retreat. ...

"The battle between the two trends will not be won by ideological speeches and exhortations but by capital and productivity. Here the crushing weight of the capitalist world economy will prove decisive."

However, Martin sees hope in developments elsewhere in Latin America:

"In our opinion, the only real way forward for the Cuban revolution is revolutionary internationalism and workers' democracy. The fate of the Cuban revolution is intimately linked to the fate of the Venezuelan revolution and the Latin American revolution in the first instance, and to the world revolution more generally."

Cuban Communist Frank Josué Solar Cabrales, in "Which Way for the Cuban Revolution? – A Contribution to the Debate," shares Martin's concerns but sees some grounds for optimism:

"There are very positive signs. For example, the repeated references to the central role to be played by workers in the fight against corruption and inefficiency, as well as in economic discussions on the plan in each workplace. Also the appeals made by Raul [Castro] himself for a greater democratization of our Communist Party and the governmental and political structures. ...

“There are also the debates, generated as a result of Raul’s speech, the debates at the congresses of the CTC [Confederation of Cuban Workers], the FEU [Federation of University Students] and the UNEAC [National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba], in addition to the constant appeals from the country’s leadership for a frank and open discussion between revolutionaries, as a suitable and healthy method for finding a solution to our problems.”

However, Solar Cabrales points to some “profound shortcomings we still have in that respect.”

“It is necessary that the choice of the way forward should come out of a broad national public debate on all the key issues, so as to incorporate the people into the decision. In that sense I consider as counterproductive the fact, first, that the results of the discussions that took place throughout the country following the speech by Raul on 26 July [2007] in Camagüey were kept secret, and second, that the measures derived from them were studied and determined by only a group of people in the leadership of the Revolution, without popular participation. I also think that the Congress of the Party should not be delayed any longer. The need for it is increasingly clear.”

Helen Yaffe is the author of *Che Guevara, The Economics of Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan), a valuable account of Guevara’s thinking on the political economy of Cuba and, more generally, of societies attempting a transition to socialism. In “Cuba: the Drive for Efficiency within Socialism,” she contrasts Cuba’s present economic situation with the disastrous crisis it experienced as a result of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, once the country’s main trading partner. She cites statistics indicating a turnaround in Cuba’s current situation and is optimistic for “future advances.” The new measures, she says, are a sign that “prospects are improving.”

“The type of major adjustment currently proposed in the employment structure could not be risked in a period of vulnerability. Since 2007, the Cuban government has promoted debate and discussion at all levels of society in an effort to achieve national consensus about the need for such changes. Rather than a knee-jerk reaction to economic problems, it is likely that employment changes were in fact postponed until the present period in which prospects are improving and certain preconditions have been established.”

Yaffe dismisses concerns that the new measures will further increase the size of Cuba’s “informal sector” of those who are unemployed, under-employed or lacking steady employment. In her view, the opposite will happen.

“... only a small minority of Cuban workers will be self-employed. Their income will be progressively taxed, they will pay social security and be carefully regulated.

“The result will be to increase both government income and the provision of goods and services in certain areas, leading to price reductions and falling incomes for those operating in the informal sector. This, along with a continued rise in state-sector salaries, will reduce the relative benefit for individuals operating outside the formal sector. Accompanying the employment changes is a restructuring of the education system to decrease the number of university students and increase technical training and manual

skills.”

In “Behind the New Economic Measures in Cuba,” Ike Nahem likewise sees the mass layoffs of state employed workers and related measures as a step forward for the revolution and indeed for the world working class.

“There will be in Cuba no growth of mass unemployment – or as Marx put it a ‘reserve army of labor’ that suppresses the cost of labor power for capitalist employers – and the subsequent growth of poverty and destitution as is now becoming the norm in all of the advanced capitalist economies not to speak of dependent ‘Third World’ capitalist economies. Individuals let go from redundant, unproductive state and government positions will be able to return to university or technical schools for specialized training, with wage support, for new jobs in addition to those choosing to be self-employed, or join newly established co-operatives. Savings from the reductions in state expenses and budgets will go to preserve social services, modernize and improve free medical care and education, and so on. Cuba’s advances in implementing these measures and confronting its serious economic weaknesses is deeply in the interests of the world working class and is in reality a great aid in the developing struggles against capitalist austerity worldwide.

...

“What the revolutionary government in Cuba is attempting to consciously and deliberately implement is a process that will lead to the numerical growth, social expansion, growing political weight of industrial workers, agricultural workers, and working farmers – private-family and cooperative. This will be greater than the inevitable rise in petty-bourgeois layers involved in retail services, brokerage, and speculation. These class demographic changes will emerge out of the accompanying decline (a good thing!) in the numbers of bureaucrats in state institutions and enterprises whose official jobs breed demoralization insofar as they register nonproductive activity which, in the framework of scarcity and economic pressure, can foster corruption and thievery.

“The concomitant growth of petty bourgeois layers will undoubtedly foster relative social inequality, but, of course, this has been happening and reproducing anyway in the form of the so-called ‘black market’ and illegal economic activity unregulated by the workers’ state. And if labor productivity and the social surplus product increases, within the framework of the workers state, the material basis (and also the political basis) for advancing social equality will also advance. Increases in labor productivity and a radical expansion in agricultural output will allow for large savings in foreign exchange currency that can then be used for industrialization and the ‘light industry’ production of consumers products and quality services.”

* * *

Widely divergent analyses. Largely missing so far, in the international debate, are the hard facts on how the new measures are being implemented in Cuba and how the Cubans are responding to this sharp new turn by their revolutionary government.

Socialist Voice #461, November 17, 2010

ALBA nations declare: Nature has no price!

Statement adopted by Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, at an ALBA ministers' meeting in Bolivia, November 3-5, From Climate & Capitalism. Spanish text below.

Ministers, Authorities of the Ministerial Committee for the Defense of Nature of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Republic of Cuba, Republic of Ecuador, Republic of Nicaragua, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, members of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas – Treaty of Commerce of the People (ALBA-TCP), gathered in the city of La Paz in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, from November 3rd to 5th, 2010.

Considering that:

1. There is within the United Nations is a push to promote the concept of a “green economy” or a “Global Green New Deal”[1] in order to extend capitalism in the economic, social and environmental arenas, in which nature is seen as “capital” for producing tradable environmental goods and services that should then be valued in monetary terms and assigned a price so that they can be commercialized with the purpose of obtaining profits.
2. Studies are being carried out and manipulated, such as the Stern Report on the Economics of Climate Change and the study on the Economy of Ecosystems and Biodiversity,[2] among others, in order to promote the privatization and the mercantilization of nature through the development of markets for environmental services, among other instruments.
3. Those who promote this new form of privatization and mercantilization of nature wish to develop a new kind of property rights which are not exercised over a natural resource in itself, but rather, over the functions offered by particular ecosystems, thus opening up the possibility of commercializing them in the market through certificates, bonds, credits, etc.
4. Under this capitalist conception that seeks only to guarantee benefit for those few who wield economic power: water should be privatized and distributed only to those that can afford to pay for it, forests are only good for capturing emissions and for selling on the carbon market that allows rich countries to avoid reducing emissions within their own territories, and genetic resources must be appropriated and patented for the enjoyment of those who possess modern technology.

Recognizing that:

The right to safe drinking water and sanitation is a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life, which has been endorsed by the United Nations and can only be guaranteed through the recognition and defense of the rights of Mother Earth.

Convinced that:

States are responsible for guaranteeing the sovereignty of the peoples over their natural patrimony and natural resources.

We declare:

1. That nature is our home and is the system of which we form a part, and that therefore it has infinite value, but does not have a price and is not for sale.
2. Our commitment to preventing capitalism from continuing to expand in the spheres that are essential to life and nature, being that this is one of the greatest challenges confronting humanity.
3. Our absolute rejection of the privatization, monetization and mercantilization of nature, for it leads to a greater imbalance in the environment and goes against our ethical principles.
4. Our condemnation of unsustainable models of economic growth that are created at the expense of our resources and the sovereignty of our peoples.
5. Only a humanity that is conscious of its present and future responsibilities, and states with the political will to carry out their role, can change the course of history and restore equilibrium in nature and life as a whole.
6. That instead of promoting the privatization of goods and services that come from nature, it is essential to recognize that these have a collective character, and, as such, should be conserved as public goods, respecting the sovereignty of states.
7. It is not the invisible hand of the market that will allow for the recuperation of equilibrium on Mother Earth. Only with the conscious intervention of state and society through policies, public regulations, and the strengthening of public services can the equilibrium of nature be restored.
8. Cancun cannot be another Copenhagen; we hope that accords will be reached in which developed countries truly act according to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and effectively assume their obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, without making climate change into a business through the promotion and creation of carbon market mechanisms.
9. That, committed to life, the countries present at this meeting agree to include in our permanent agenda, among other actions, the realization of a referendum on climate change and the promotion of the participation of the peoples of the world.

10. That it is urgent to adopt at the United Nations a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.

[1] Global Green New Deal, 2009

[2] The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity

La Naturaleza No Tiene Precio

Las Ministras y Ministros, y Autoridades del Comité Ministerial de Defensa de la Naturaleza del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, República de Cuba, República del Ecuador, República de Nicaragua, y la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, miembros de la Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América – Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos” (ALBA – TCP), reunidos en la ciudad de La Paz, Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, del 3 al 5 de noviembre de 2010.

Considerando que:

1. Dentro de las Naciones Unidas se viene impulsando el concepto de “economía verde” o “Nuevo Acuerdo Verde Global”[1], para extender el capitalismo en lo económico, social y lo ambiental, que asume a la naturaleza como un “capital” productor de bienes y servicios ambientales transables, que deben ser valorados en términos monetarios, asignándoles un precio para luego comercializarlos con el fin de obtener ganancia.
2. Se realizan y manipulan estudios como el Informe Stern sobre la Economía del Cambio Climático y el estudio sobre la Economía de Ecosistemas y Biodiversidad[2] entre otros, para promover la privatización y mercantilización de la Naturaleza mediante el desarrollo de mercados de pago por servicios ambientales, entre otros instrumentos.
3. Bajo esta concepción capitalista que busca garantizar solamente el beneficio de unos pocos provistos de poder económico: el agua debe ser privatizada y suministrada solo a quien pueda pagarla, los bosques sólo sirven para capturar emisiones y venderlas en mercados de carbono para permitir que los países ricos no reduzcan sus emisiones dentro de sus territorios, y los recursos genéticos tienen que ser apropiados y patentados por quienes detentan la tecnología moderna para poder ser disfrutados.
4. Los promotores de esta nueva forma de privatización y mercantilización de la naturaleza quieren desarrollar un nuevo tipo de derecho de propiedad, que no se ejerce sobre un recurso natural en sí, sino sobre las funciones que prestan los ecosistemas, y que otorgaría la potestad de comercializarlas en el mercado, a través de certificados, bonos, créditos, entre otros.

Reconociendo que:

El derecho al agua potable segura y al saneamiento es un derecho humano esencial para el goce pleno de la vida, que ha sido refrendado por la Organización de las Naciones Unidas y que sólo puede ser garantizado a través del reconocimiento y defensa de los Derechos de la Madre Tierra

Convencidos que:

Los Estados son los responsables de garantizar la soberanía de los pueblos sobre su patrimonio natural y sus recursos naturales.

Declaramos:

1. Que la naturaleza es nuestro hogar y es el sistema del cual somos parte, por tanto tiene un infinito valor, pero no tiene un precio y no está en venta.
2. Nuestro compromiso de evitar que el capitalismo se continúe expandiendo en las esferas esenciales de la vida y la naturaleza, siendo éste uno de los más grandes desafíos que enfrenta la humanidad.
3. Nuestro contundente rechazo a la privatización, monetarización y mercantilización de la naturaleza, por impulsar un mayor desequilibrio del medioambiente e ir en contra de nuestros principios éticos.
4. Nuestra condena a los modelos de crecimiento económico no sustentables que se construyen a costa de nuestros recursos y de la soberanía de nuestros pueblos.
5. Que sólo una humanidad consciente de su responsabilidad presente y futura y Estados con voluntad política para desempeñar su papel, pueden cambiar el curso de la historia y rescatar el equilibrio de la naturaleza y la vida en su conjunto.
6. Que lejos de promover la privatización de los bienes y servicios provenientes de la naturaleza, es esencial reconocer que estos son de carácter colectivo, y que como tales deben ser conservados como un bien público, respetando la soberanía de los Estados sobre los mismos.
7. No es la mano invisible del mercado la que permitirá recuperar el equilibrio de la Madre Tierra. Sólo con la intervención consciente del Estado y la sociedad a través de políticas, regulaciones públicas y el fortalecimiento de los servicios públicos se podrá restaurar el equilibrio de la naturaleza.
8. Cancún no debe ser otro Copenhague; esperamos que se alcancen acuerdos en los que los países desarrollados verdaderamente actúen de acuerdo al principio de responsabilidades comunes pero diferenciadas, y asuman efectivamente su obligación de reducción de emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero, sin hacer del cambio climático un negocio a través de la promoción y creación de mecanismos dentro del mercado de carbono.

9. Que comprometidos con la vida, los países presentes en esta reunión acordamos incluir en nuestra agenda permanente, entre otras acciones, la realización de un Referéndum sobre cambio climático y la promoción de la participación de todos los pueblos del mundo.
10. Que es urgente la adopción en las Naciones Unidas de una Declaración Universal de los Derechos de la Madre Tierra.

[1] Nuevo Acuerdo Verde Global, 2009

[2] La Economía de Ecosistemas y la Biodiversidad (TEBB)

Socialist Voice #462, November 17, 2010

Toronto Teach-In Responds to the Cochabamba Challenge

By Ian Angus

Some 125 people took part in the teach-in Lessons from Bolivia: Building a Global Movement for Climate Justice in Toronto on Saturday November 13. The meeting was sponsored by nearly 40 organizations, including unions, solidarity campaigns and environmental groups.

In a keynote address, Erika Dueñas of the Bolivian Embassy in Washington DC explained her country's achievements in carrying the Cochabamba agenda into the arena of inter-governmental negotiations on climate change.

The final session discussed plans for a People's Assembly on Climate Justice in Toronto December 4, for a popular consultation during 2011, based on a proposal of the Cochabamba conference, and for a Canada-wide climate justice conference in the spring of 2011 to be hosted in Montreal by Alternatives.

The following is the text (lightly edited) of the talk given by Climate and Capitalism editor Ian Angus to the opening session.

Good morning. Thank you for being here, and thanks to the organizers for inviting me.

We're here to discuss, learn from and build on April's mass international assembly in Cochabamba, Bolivia, an unprecedented meeting that adopted a powerful charter for action to protect our planet from ecological devastation.

Following the failed climate negotiations in Copenhagen in December, where Barack Obama tried unsuccessfully to impose a toothless backroom deal, Bolivian President Evo Morales invited "the peoples of the world, social movements and Mother Earth's defenders, ... scientists, academics, lawyers and governments," to attend a conference "to define strategies for action and mobilization to defend life from Climate Change and to defend Mother Earth's Rights."

That call struck a chord with activists around the world. Despite the ash from a volcano in Iceland that grounded many international flights, more than 35,000 people, took part in World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. The participants included thousands of activists from social movements in more than 100 countries.

Particularly notable was the large number of Indigenous people from throughout South and North America, who played leading roles in defining the meeting's environmental philosophy and drawing up a program for action.

Over three days and nights of intensive discussions in 17 working groups, the participants drafted and adopted a People's Agreement that places responsibility for the climate crisis on the

capitalist system and on the rich countries that “have a carbon footprint five times larger than the planet can bear.”

It said:

“The corporations and governments of the so-called “developed” countries, in complicity with a segment of the scientific community, have led us to discuss climate change as a problem limited to the rise in temperature without questioning the cause, which is the capitalist system...

“The capitalist system has imposed on us a logic of competition, progress and limitless growth. This regime of production and consumption seeks profit without limits, separating human beings from nature and imposing a logic of domination upon nature, transforming everything into commodities. ...

“Under capitalism, Mother Earth is converted into a source of raw materials, and human beings into consumers and a means of production, into people who are seen as valuable only for what they own, and not for what they are.

“Capitalism requires a powerful military industry for its processes of accumulation and imposition of control over territories and natural resources, suppressing the resistance of the peoples. It is an imperialist system of colonization of the planet.

“Humanity confronts a great dilemma: to continue on the path of capitalism, depredation, and death, or to choose the path of harmony with nature and respect for life.”

The People’s Agreement calls on industrialized countries to cut domestic emission reductions to 50% below 1990 levels by 2017, and to compensate developing countries for the destruction caused by climate change.

It rejects the use of market mechanisms, in particular the World Bank’s REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) program, which purports to pay governments and companies in the South for not cutting down forests. The best way to protect forests, the Agreement says, is:

“to recognize and guarantee the collective rights of lands and territories, especially considering that most of the forests and jungles are in the territories of indigenous peoples and nations, and traditional farming communities.”

It calls for full implementation of the U.N. declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights.

In view of the failure of many countries (including Canada) to honour their commitments under the Kyoto Accord, the meeting in Bolivia proposes creation of an International Court of Climate and Environmental Justice with the power to impose sanctions.

And in response to the efforts of the U.S. and other countries to limit climate negotiations to a hand-picked group of so-called world leaders, the Conference called for a worldwide “people’s

referendum” on climate change, in which everyone can vote on key points in the Cochabamba program.

Evo Morales told the delegates that the eight member countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) would enter the next round of international climate negotiations, leading up to the meeting in Cancun Mexico in December, with a submission that is based on the proposals that came out of the Cochabamba conference. And unlike the heads of state we usually deal with, the ALBA nations kept that promise and have submitted the Cochabamba program to the negotiations.

As Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez said at the final session of the conference:

“In Cancun we cannot permit the imperial dictatorship to impose itself. We must go to Cancun to continue the battle of Copenhagen with greater fury... we are not going to allow the imposition of a document that does not include the voices of the people.”

In my opinion, the Cochabamba meeting was a major step toward building a mass democratic movement against climate change. The resolutions adopted in Bolivia provide a programmatic basis for such a movement. It’s now up to us to make that potential a reality.

For just a minute, I’d like to address the people here who come from my tradition – those of us who view ourselves as tough, hard-minded materialist radicals. The Cochabamba resolutions, and the discussions here today, include many references to Pachamama, Mother Earth. Many of us feel uncomfortable with that language – it seems sentimental, or mystical, not properly revolutionary. I fully understand that response – *but it is wrong*. The Indigenous cosmovision may sound different from what we learned, but it is completely compatible with the militant struggle for social justice we all support, and we can all learn from it.

During one of the sessions in Cochabamba, a man whose credentials as a serious revolutionary can’t be doubted, the former guerilla leader and now vice-president of Bolivia, Alvaro Garcia Linera, said:

“The concept of Mother Earth is not just a slogan. It means a new way of producing, a new way of relating with nature and with one another. This relationship is one of equality and not domination, a relationship of dialogue, of giving and receiving. It is not merely a philosophy or folklore. It is a new ethics, a new way of developing technologies and modes of production.”

He recalled a slogan introduced by another tough materialist, Rosa Luxemburg – “socialism or barbarism” – and said that today we should say, “Mother Earth or barbarism.”

Or, as the Indigenous People’s Declaration adopted in Cochabamba says, “Mother Earth can live without us, but we cannot live without her.”

Cochabamba poses an historic opportunity and challenge for environmental activists to join hands with working people, with indigenous activists, with anti-imperialist movements here and

around the world. If we meet that challenge, we can build a mass movement to block the drive to barbarism, and build the better world we know is possible.

In his talk a few minutes ago, Marcelo Saavedra-Vargas said that we need to build on the contributions and efforts of our ancestors, without whom we wouldn't be here. I agree with him, and I'd like to add something to that. Our task is to *be good ancestors*, to rescue and restore Mother Earth so that our children and their children can live well, for generations to come.

Thank you.

Socialist Voice #463, November 29, 2010

Extension of Afghan military deployment stirs debate and protests in Canada

By Tim Kennelly and Roger Annis

On November 11, Remembrance Day, Canada's prime minister Stephen Harper announced that his government has unilaterally decided, without even a debate or vote in Parliament, to extend Canada's military "mission" in Afghanistan for three more years, until 2014.

It subsequently joined in a unanimous decision of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at a summit meeting in Portugal to prolong NATO's murderous occupation of that country for at least another four years.

The move would see the Canadian military presence, currently close to 3,000 troops, reduced to about 1,000 by July of next year.

The decision has fueled debate over a war that is increasingly unpopular, not least because it is a snub to those Canadians who took Parliament for its word when it voted in 2008 that Canada would withdraw its soldiers from Afghanistan by July 2011. That deadline was aimed at deflecting growing disaffection with the war.

In a new attempt this time to disarm antiwar critics, the Harper government is arguing that Canada's renewed military contingent will be confined to "training" Afghan police and military. Full-scale combat by Canadians will end, we're told.

Harper failed to explain why — some 10 years after Western military forces toppled the previous government — the Afghan military still needs further training. Some 30 percent of those trained are reported to defect, many of them taking their weapons to join the growing Afghan resistance to the NATO occupation.

Harper said there was no need for a vote in Parliament because the decision is consistent with the "spirit" of Canada's original decision to go to war and he has the support of the largest opposition party, the Liberals. In fact, Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff and Liberal foreign affairs critic Bob Rae have been publicly urging Harper for some time to extend the mission.

The two other opposition parties, the Bloc Québécois and New Democratic Party, oppose the extension. The Bloc has moved a motion, to be voted in the House of Commons on November 30, that condemns the decision to "unilaterally" extend the military mission. As the motion states, the unilateral decision violates the promise "that any military deployment would be subject to a vote in Parliament".

The resolution sparked a rare, lengthy debate on Afghanistan in the House on November 25. However, regardless of its outcome, it is clear that the government now has the votes it needs to endorse its decision to extend the Afghan troop deployment. Liberal leader Ignatieff agrees with Harper that a vote in Parliament is not required to extend the mission. And although there are

rumours of divisions within the party over the extension, Ignatieff has enough support to give Harper his majority.

A mere “Training Mission”?

Canada was leaned on heavily by its NATO allies to scrap the 2011 exit date. The Obama administration has been trying to lull the people of the United States and the rest of the world into believing it has an “exit strategy” from Afghanistan that consists of placing Afghan allies in the lead role of a counter-insurgency war with no defined goal or foreseeable end.

A key part of selling the military extension is the ruse that Canadian troops will largely remain “behind the wire” of their military compounds. However, a different story is emerging from news reports.

An anonymous government official told the *Globe and Mail* on November 16 that Canadian soldiers will be posted not only to the relative safe area of Kabul, but to other parts of the country as well. The U.S. and NATO say that “trainers” will be posted everywhere in the country.

Edmund Whiteside, NATO Council Secretary, told an audience at Concordia University in Montreal on October 25 that “Afghanistan will be a very long military venture.”

Antiwar voices

Antiwar activists have been quick to denounce the government decision as a violation of the rights of the Afghan people. As the Canadian Peace Alliance (CPA) stated, “Regardless of the specifics of the mission, by staying in Afghanistan, Canada continues to enable a corrupt warlord led government that abuses the rights of the Afghan people.”

In the Vancouver weekly *Georgia Straight*, CPA co-chair Derrick O’Keefe charged that Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff is responsible for the prolongation of the Afghanistan adventure. “You can actually fault Ignatieff and the Liberals more (than the Conservative government) because they have been publicly advocating for this war for some time.”

Scott Taylor, a former Canadian soldier and publisher of *Esprit de Corps* magazine, told CBC’s *The Current* on November 15 there is “no hint of optimism” in the government’s pronouncements that the new mission would be completed by 2014.

When asked what role “training” troops could play in Afghanistan, he replied, “I am against us leaving soldiers there in the first place... The things we could be doing, with a little creativity and recruiting of Afghan Canadians... is training Afghans to become plumbers, electricians, masons, anything that would begin to rebuild or build that country.”

Taylor has produced a one-hour documentary film that premiered on CPAC television on November 21 titled, “Afghanistan: Outside the Wire.” In it, he says that Afghan lives are largely untouched by the billions of dollars in aid money that have poured into the country. Aid programs have “largely failed” the Afghan people.

War Agenda

Canada's rulers are deeply committed to militarism and war. The country's two national daily newspapers back the course strongly. The *Globe and Mail* ran a week-long series of articles in October extolling Canada's new Afghanistan-earned military capacity. The thrust of the series is that Canada now has a model battle-tested army that can and should be used to wage war around the world.

The support by the Liberals to this latest decision places new strains on those who have looked to a political alliance between the Liberals and the New Democratic Party to unseat the government.

In 2008 the two parties, with Bloc Québécois support, agreed to form a coalition that would defeat the Harper Conservatives and form a government. At the time, the NDP agreed to set aside its opposition to the "combat mission" in Afghanistan should the coalition find itself in government. The agreement was scuttled when the Liberals elected a new leader, Michael Ignatieff.

In the lead-up to announcement of the new mission extension, Conservatives and Liberals quietly maneuvered to stifle growing public debate over reports that Canadian troops knowingly transferred captured Afghan resistance fighters and suspected insurgents to Canada's Afghan allies in full knowledge that they faced probable torture.

The two parties have buried a Parliamentary examination of the issue under an avalanche of procedure, paperwork and outright stonewalling.

In a sign of the limits of the Bloc's antiwar stance, the party voted on November 23 against a Liberal motion to cancel the government's decision to spend \$16 billion-plus on new F35 fighter jets — the largest single purchase in Canadian government history, also decided without a vote in Parliament. The motion was defeated by the votes of Tory MPs, supported by the Bloc. Its leader, Gilles Duceppe, argued that the important thing was not to cancel the contract but to guarantee that Quebec receive its fair share of the economic spin-offs!

In the Parliamentary debate on November 25, Bloc Québécois and NDP MPs, while critical of the extension, praised the role of Canada's military in Afghanistan and said a "civilian" mission should be put in place that would assist the Afghan government with policing and oversee the spending of aid and development money.

Both parties are short on specifics of what such a mission would look like and how it could operate in the midst of an ongoing war. None of the MPs of either party who spoke in the debate called for an end to the NATO-led war or a withdrawal of foreign military occupation forces.

Anti-War Action

There have been scattered demonstrations against the extension of the military mission in a number of cities. In Montréal, the antiwar coalition *Échec à la Guerre* (Stop War) held a "People's Summit Against War and Militarism" on the weekend of November 19-21, attended

by more than 200 people. It issued a strong statement signed by 70 organizations denouncing Canada's participation in "a war of occupation in Afghanistan" and the militarization of Canadian foreign and domestic policy.

And a 10-city speaking tour of Canada by British antiwar activist George Galloway, which coincided with the extension announcement, drew audiences in the thousands. Galloway is a former British MP who was kicked out of the Labour Party for his opposition to the war in Iraq while the party was in government and directing Britain's role in that bloody conflict. He is also an outspoken opponent of the war in Afghanistan and a strong supporter of the struggle of the Palestinian people.

Galloway was banned from entering Canada in March 2009 because the Canadian government hates his views on the never-ending war against the Palestinian people. He challenged the ban in Federal Court earlier this year and won the right to enter the country.

A right-wing campaign sprang up against the speaking tour, seeking to block it from taking place or at least minimize its impact. It failed miserably. Galloway is suing the federal government and its Minister of Immigration for the 2009 ban. He promises that every penny awarded, if he is successful, will be dedicated to building a stronger antiwar movement in Canada.

Former Afghan MP and social activist Malalai Joya completed a successful four-city speaking tour of Canada in early October. She addressed large audiences in Calgary, Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver. The tour included a press conference at the Parliamentary Press Gallery and a thirty minute interview on the prestigious CBC national television program, Mansbridge One on One.

Joya told host Peter Mansbridge that "For nine years, [Canada] has followed the wrong policy of the U.S., which is not only a mockery of democracy and war on terror, to tell you better, it is just a war crime."

The public debate that has opened up in Canada on the extension of the war mission in Afghanistan opens new and unprecedented opportunities to mobilize Canadians in demanding that all Canadian and foreign troops leave Afghanistan. This is the starting point of any effort to repay the people there for the terrible destruction that has befallen them at the hands of the U.S., Canada and their other warmaking allies.

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People's Summit in Quebec issues call for antiwar actions

The People's Summit Against War and Militarism, which met in Montréal November 19-21, was attended by 225 persons from a wide range of organizations. It issued a Joint Declaration endorsed by more than 70 organizations including trade unions, women's and student organizations, civil liberties groups, and other social movements and grassroots community organizations in Quebec.

The declaration is also supported by seven peace groups in English Canada, including the Canadian Peace Alliance.

The People's Summit was called by the Montréal antiwar collective *Échec à la Guerre* (Stop War), which organized the massive antiwar demonstrations of almost a quarter million in the streets of Montréal in 2003, on the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In addition to opposing Canada's war of occupation in Afghanistan, the collective campaigns against Canada's military spending and military recruitment in educational institutions, and in support of war resisters in the military.

The People's Summit opened with an address by keynote speaker Jean Bricmont, author of the book *Humanitarian Imperialism*, and was followed by a day of workshops and panels on the issues and campaigns facing the antiwar movement in the coming period. The participants agreed to publicize and obtain signatures for their Declaration, to continue actions in opposition to the war in Afghanistan, and to campaign for the holding of a wide-ranging public debate on Canadian foreign policy and the role of the Canadian army.

For background on the People's Summit and the work of *Échec à la Guerre*, see "People's Summit Against War and Militarism to be held in Montréal."

The following text of the Joint Declaration was translated from French by *Socialist Voice*.

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For an End to the Logic of War and Domination!

As Quebec organizations devoted to the defense and expansion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, here and throughout the world,

As citizens of Quebec yearning for peace and justice and anxious to develop international relations of co-operation founded on equality and solidarity,

1. WE ARE OUTRAGED AT:

- Canada's descent into an increasing spiral of war and curtailment of democracy;
- Canada's participation since October 2001 in a war of occupation in Afghanistan, sowing death and destruction under the pretext of a fight for democracy, security and women's rights in that country, and which is now spreading into Pakistan;

- the Canadian parliament's vote extending that intervention at least until July 2011, in violation of the will of the majority of the population;
- the ceaseless increase in the public funds allocated to this logic of war (in Canada alone, \$58 million dollars per day in 2009-2010) to the detriment of social spending and genuine development assistance;
- Canada's complicity with torture, both of Afghans captured in combat and of some Canadian citizens imprisoned abroad;
- the militarization of Canadian society, which entails increasing violence, especially against women;
- the fear-mongering about a terrorist threat that is exaggerated in order to justify the war and the many measures of surveillance and repression eroding our rights and freedoms;
- the pervasive public relations activities of the Canadian army in major sports, social and family events, and their recruitment campaigns in educational institutions, even the elementary schools;
- the increasingly serious social and environmental effects of the wars and military training exercises; and
- the growing militarization of the Arctic hand in hand with environmentally harmful economic projects and denial of the rights of the Indigenous peoples.

2. WE DENOUNCE THE "HAWKS" HERE IN CANADA

- successive Canadian governments, both Liberal and Conservative, that have led us into this dynamic and justified the war with groundless arguments;
- the major business interests, headed by the Business Council on National Issues, who see only opportunities for profits, especially for the military industry;
- the political parties that implement war policies or oppose them only half-heartedly; and
- the major media, which soft-peddle the opposition of a majority of the population to the war and do not report its tragic consequences for civilian populations.

3. WE CATEGORICALLY REJECT the false discourse of the "war against terrorism" and Canada's direct or indirect military involvement alongside the United States in the context of a policy designed to extend their hegemony to the planet as a whole, characterized by

- many wars initiated and conducted in violation of international law, including international humanitarian law: Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Lebanon (2006), Gaza (2009); and others that are apprehended against Iran and North Korea, even with threats of nuclear strikes;

- the hijacking of the UN Security Council, which does not condemn these illegal assaults or the war crimes they entail or the blatant projects of foreign control implemented by the aggressors in violation of international law;
- NATO's provocative expansion to the East and its dual transformation — as the armed wing of US hegemony intervening throughout the world, and as a proxy for the UN — thereby profoundly discrediting the UN in the eyes of world public opinion;
- the threats and destabilization plans in regard to some countries that refuse to submit to the “New World Order” imposed by the United States; and
- a renewed arms race, including the development of new nuclear weapons and the increased militarization of space.

4. WE CALL ON THE PEOPLE OF QUEBEC TO MOBILIZE to help reverse this destructive world dynamic, by demanding

of the Government of Canada:

- the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan;
- a large reduction in military spending and the holding of a wide-ranging public debate on Canadian foreign policy, the role of the army, the military industry, and the arms trade;
- the end of Canada's military partnership with the United States, including Canada's withdrawal from NATO; and
- an end to its discourse instrumentalizing women's rights and promoting the “responsibility to protect” in order to justify the war, and a firm condemnation of any intervention that is inconsistent with international law;

and of the international community:

- the democratic renewal of the UN, and in particular full respect for its Charter, a stronger role for the General Assembly and a far-reaching reform of the Security Council, including abolition of the right of veto; and
- the application of Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council concerning the involvement of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace processes.

November 21, 2010