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Into the Quagmire: Canadian Military Invades Southern Afghanistan

By Roger Annis

The newly-elected Prime Minister of Canada has committed his Conservative Party government to a long-term military adventure in Afghanistan. So as to make the commitment crystal clear, Stephen Harper made the new, forward Canadian military base in Kandahar his first foreign foray. He made a highly publicized visit on March 12-13.

In a speech to soldiers and assembled journalists, Harper declared, "We recognize—the international community recognizes—that this is a long-term project. And we're here for the long term."

The Conservatives are following the trail blazed by their Liberal Party predecessor. Canada joined the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan in 2002. Late last year, it made a significant increase in that commitment when it accepted to head up a "provincial reconstruction team" (PRT) in Kandahar and neighbouring provinces in the south of the country.

"PRT's" are the forward offensive units of the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) occupation forces in Afghanistan. Troops from the U.S., Germany, Britain, Italy, and more recently Canada and the Netherlands, have divided the country into operational zones.

Comprising more than 2,000 combat troops, the Canadian military force arrived in Kandahar in February and immediately began offensive military operations.

Canada's corporate media, most already strongly supportive of the U.S. war in Iraq, quickly fell into step with the Afghanistan adventure. Television screens and print news publications have been filled with reports from embedded journalists, cheering on the Canadian mission. For one week in early April, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's based its main nightly television news broadcast at the Kandahar air base.

War, not peacekeeping

The Canadian mission to Afghanistan is the first foreign mission in a half-century in which the declared aim is warmaking, not "peacekeeping". Brigadier-General David Fraser described it as follows on February 15, "We'll be training the Afghan national security forces ... so when they want to go out and do operations against that minority that's trying to destabilize the good people here, we'll be out there to support them. And if that means hunting, we'll be out there hunting."

A Canadian commander, Lt.-Col. Tom Doucet, told journalists in Kandahar on March 12 that while the eventual goal of the "PRT" is to rebuild schools, roads and infrastructure, the key issue now is security. "Once we get rid of the bad people," he said, "we can carry on with full force in terms of the reconstruction and development."

The "bad people," or as the head of Canada's armed forces put it last summer, "the murderers and scumbags," are those people in Afghanistan who resist for whatever reasons a foreign occupation of their country or who protest the refusal of foreigners to help solve crying social and economic needs.

The new warmaking strategy ties the projects of non-governmental organizations and other "civil society" groups directly to the military effort. An article in the March 2006 issue of *Walrus* magazine explained:

"One unique aspect of the new strategy is the way that development and humanitarian aid are being used specifically for the purpose of building loyalty toward coalition forces and democratic reforms. The American, British, and Canadian governments all have representatives from their international development and relief agencies stationed in Afghanistan; the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) alone plans to spend \$616 million there by 2009....

"The strategic use of aid [sic] may offend some, but this approach is gaining credibility and has been adopted by CIDA and Foreign Affairs."

Such abuse of foreign aid has prompted some highly reputable aid organizations to leave Afghanistan. Doctors Without Borders pulled out in 2004 after a 26-year presence delivering vital medical services to the civilian population. Marie-Madeleine Lepplomb of the group's Paris office told Radio Free Europe, "Given the multiplication of actors, how can the [Afghan] community recognize who is a humanitarian worker and who is doing intelligence? We are not credible anymore."

Government, media rally prowar sentiment

The Kandahar mission received a rude shock from public opinion polls in February and March. In one, a Globe and Mail/CTV poll published on February 24, 62 percent of respondents said they were opposed to sending troops to Afghanistan, while 43 percent said they opposed Canadian participation in “the war on terrorism.” In response, an intense government and media campaign in support of the war in Afghanistan went into high gear.

Poll numbers may improve for the government as its pro-war propaganda campaign progresses, but they reflect a major problem for the Canadian intervention. Large sections of the Canadian population are deeply skeptical of the war’s stated aims, if not outright hostile. Demonstrations across Canada on March 18, the day of international opposition to the war in Iraq, drew attention to this. Opposition to the war in Afghanistan was a prominent theme. More than 3,000 people marched in each of Vancouver and Toronto, more than 2,000 in Montreal, and some 750 in Ottawa.

Like the U.S.-led war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan is being waged in the name of helping the people of that country to build a new and progressive society. “The international community is determined to create a democratic, prosperous, modern country that can be a model in this part of the world”, Stephen Harper stated in Kandahar on March 13.

But Canada is there in order to earn its share of the oil, mineral and other resource wealth in the region and to earn its place in the new imperialist world order that its allies in the U.S. and U.K. are determined to create. To cite one example, Canada’s long-serving and former prime minister Jean Chrétien is today a legal representative for several Canadian oil and gas companies seeking production and pipeline investments in central Asia. These projects require a “stable” Afghanistan so that pipeline projects can go ahead.

Common economic interests are drawing Canada closer to U.S. political and military strategy throughout the Middle East and the world. Canada sat out the 2003 Iraq war. But since then, it has undertaken significant political and military moves to back the U.S./U.K. policy in Iraq and the region. These include establishing a military base in Dubai, on the shores of the Persian Gulf, and joining in the international gang-up on the government and people of Iran.

Canada played a lead role in the overthrow of the elected government of Haiti in 2004, a government that Canada and the U.S. deemed to be a threat to their extensive interests in the Caribbean.

The new, Canada-backed imperialist world order has no place for the provision of basic human rights and social services to peoples. Thus, in Iraq today, there is still no reliable supply of electricity, clean water, health care, and economic development to the people of that country, three years after the U.S. and U.K. “liberated” it. Prisons are overflowing, and torture is routinely practiced.

Similarly in Afghanistan and Haiti, the provision of meaningful services to the populations are little more than an afterthought to the Canadian effort. Accusations of brutalizing Afghan civilians have already been levied against Canadian soldiers. The family of Nasrat Ali Hassan, a

rickshaw driver in Kandahar, condemned the Canadian military after a Canadian soldier opened fire without warning and killed him on March 14. In Haiti over the past two years, Canada has trained a new police force that stands accused of massive human rights violations.

Prison conditions in Afghanistan are reportedly worse than the horrors that have come to light in Iraq. This poses a delicate dilemma for the Canadian occupiers. On December 18, chief of Canada's armed forces Richard Hillier signed an agreement that has Canadian soldiers turning people it has imprisoned over to the Afghan government military authorities.

"Hillier is placing rank-and-file Canadian troops, unwittingly, in the position of very likely being accessories to torture and, therefore, war criminals under international and Canadian law," commented Amir Attaran, a law professor at the University of Ottawa.

Even the Afghan police and army get rough treatment from their erstwhile foreign allies. They are poorly armed and trained, and suffer very high casualties. Six Afghan police were killed on April 17, apparent victims of "friendly fire" from Canadian soldiers and U.S. helicopter gunners.

Sham "debate" in Canadian Parliament

None of the four political parties in Canada's Parliament oppose the Afghan adventure. The New Democratic Party voiced the unease of the Canadian population when it called for a debate in the parliament. The government convened a "take notice" discussion in Parliament on April 10 where no vote would be taken. Most members of Parliament did not bother to show up, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe.

New Democratic Party Member of Parliament Peggy Nash said in the discussion, "I question whether the war on terrorism, as originally designed south of the border, was really a struggle for women's rights and the dignity of Afghan women. I did not hear that in the public debates at the time of the invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, but it is still a worthy goal."

The NDP's unease concerns only the way Canada's war effort is organized, not the war itself. Nash went on, "Could the government please tell us when our military will finally leave this U.S.-led operation and instead become part of a NATO-led mission with which we could all feel more comfortable?"

(Command of the "PRT" in southern Afghanistan, including Kandahar, is scheduled to shift from U.S. to NATO this summer.)

Several NDP MP's joined an antiwar rally outside the Parliament while the "debate" took place. They did not voice their views inside.

The more aggressive military posturing by Canada will cost lots more money, and all parties in Parliament voted last June to significantly boost military spending in the coming years. Military spending in 2005 was \$13.4 billion. The new Conservative government is talking of boosting that to \$17 billion annually. It has specifically cited the need for new naval craft and aircraft to boost Canada's capacity to intervene abroad.

The war is ours to stop

Sixteen Canadian soldiers have died in Afghanistan since 2002, and the pace of casualties is rising. Four soldiers died on April 22 when a convoy of Canadian vehicles was struck by a roadside bomb. It was the largest loss of life by the Canadian military in combat since the war in Korea. The government responded by following the example of its warmaking ally south of the border and banning all future media reporting from military bases when the bodies of dead soldiers are returned.

The refusal and inability of occupation forces to tackle the staggering social and economic problems in Afghanistan will fuel opposition to their presence. So, too will the occupiers' backing of the reactionary and anti-popular governing authority in Kabul.

As the Canadian mission fails in its stated aim of "winning the hearts and minds" of the Afghan people, it will bring more suffering to the Afghan people. The occupiers will resort to the same brutal methods of rule that the U.S. and Britain have already made infamous in Iraq.

Canada's rulers are deeply committed to their war alliance with the U.S. and its disastrous plans for military conquest of the Middle East. With meaningful debate closed off in Parliament and the media, Canadians must increasingly take to the streets in order to voice our opposition.

For news on the Afghanistan conflict and actions demanding Canada's withdrawal, contact the Canadian Peace Alliance, www.acp-cpa.ca.

Socialist Voice #93, May 3, 2006

Latin America's Time is Now!

By Nidia Díaz, Granma International staff writer

Introduction: *The events of the May Day weekend marked a dramatic shift in the world political situation.*

- *The Bolivian government moved decisively to nationalize and assert control over its oil and gas resources.*
- *Bolivia joined Cuba and Venezuela in a far-reaching accord for mutual assistance. (We have posted the text of that agreement on the Socialist Voice website.)*
- *In the U.S., upwards of a million working people joined in a country-wide strike and demonstration for immigrant rights, the most important action by the U.S. working class in the past sixty years.*

The following article from the Cuban newspaper Granma reports on the dramatic events in Havana April 29, where Evo Morales, Hugo Chavez, and Fidel Castro met to formalize the alliance of their peoples on the basis of “a new integration model based on fairness and respect.” –Roger Annis and John Riddell

Bolivia signs agreement to implement the Bolivarian Alternative for the peoples of Our America and the People's Trade Agreement.

On the 1st anniversary of the creation of the ALBA between Cuba and Venezuela, the figures speak for themselves regarding a new integration model based on fairness and respect. In the Plaza de la Revolucion, Fidel exposes the double standard of the United States in its supposed war against terrorism.

ONCE again, these April days have gone down in history. April 19 was the day, 45 years ago, that U.S. imperialism suffered its first military defeat in Latin America, on the Cuban sands of Playa Girón, in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion — and it has yet to recover. This April 29, 2006 in Havana, capital of the first socialist country in the hemisphere, the empire has suffered another defeat, and this time a more far-reaching one, because it is the defeat of its ideas and the imposition of its model of domination. This time, Cuba was not alone in the battle: Bolivarian Venezuela, under Hugo Chávez, and the Bolivia under indigenous leader Evo Morales were with us. On the first anniversary of the agreements to implement the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), signed by Cuba and Venezuela, a revolutionary triad has formed with the incorporation of Bolivia into this tool of integration, and the Bolivian president's proposal, moreover, of a People's Trade Agreement (TPC) as an alternative to the free trade agreements used by the U.S. government in its attempts to sink our people into greater exploitation and dependence. In the documents signed by the three leaders, which include a Joint Communiqué, positions are established on an integration process that, they agreed, must be “based on principles

of mutual aid, solidarity and respect for self-determination” with the goal of “providing an appropriate response to raising up social justice, cultural diversity, equity and the right to development that the peoples deserve and demand.” With this step taken by Bolivia, the integrationist efforts taking place throughout the continent under new nationalist and popular governments are deepening, efforts that are already bearing fruit in the case of Cuba and Venezuela. Fidel, Chávez and Evo also agreed that only a new and genuine form of integration that goes in the opposite direction of the economic and political relations established by the Free Trade Area of the Americas and other free trade agreements can guarantee sustainable and sovereign development for our peoples.

The Start of a Great Day

It was at the International Conference Center in Havana where the meeting was held of – as Evo Morales said – those who represent three generations of revolutionaries: Fidel, Hugo Chávez and the indigenous leader himself, all of whom signed the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) Implementation Agreement and the People’s Trade Agreement (TPC).

Right at 2 p.m., Marta Lomas, Cuba’s minister of foreign investment and economic cooperation, explained, demonstrating the ALBA’s justice and viability, how far Cuban-Venezuelan relations have progressed since October 30, 2000 when the two countries’ president signed the Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement that served as a basis for the December 14, 2004 signing of the Joint Declaration and the ALBA Implementation Agreement.

Consequently, Lomas noted, Cuban and Venezuelan delegations met on April 28 and 29, 2005 in what was the first meeting for the ALBA’s implementation, and where the first Strategic Plan was approved to set it into motion.

The outcome has been extremely eloquent and encouraging, and is an expression of what the peoples can achieve with agreements in which honor, solidarity and love for the people are the main objective.

It was pointed to as the most outstanding achievement of the period when, this past October 28, UNESCO declared Venezuela to be Illiteracy-Free Territory, something accomplished in less than two years of hard-fought struggle against that disgrace. Likewise, it was announced this past March 20 that Bolivia will begin a literacy campaign with the participation of 20 Venezuelan literacy educators, Bolivian experts and 48 Cuban consultants.

Alba’s Figures...

- In 2001, trade between Cuba and Venezuela was \$973 million. In 2005, that figure went up to \$2.4 billion, representing growth of 255% in non-oil Venezuelan exports to Cuba compared to 2004.
- In 2001, Cuban medical cooperation did not yet exist in Venezuela. Today, 23,601 Cuban health professionals are lending their services, providing care for more than 17 million Venezuelans, with a historic record of 175 million medical consultations.

- Currently, 3,328 Venezuelans are studying General Comprehensive Medicine in Cuba, and 12,940 are doing so in Venezuela under the Comprehensive Community Program, under the guidance of 6,525 Cuban experts who part of the Mission Barrio Adentro (Into the Barrio) Program.
- As of April 28, under the Operation Miracle program, 220,571 vision restoration operations had been performed, with 188,389 of them on Venezuelans. In 2001, Operation Miracle did not yet exist; today, patients from 17 Latin America and Caribbean nations are benefiting, and others are joining in.
- In 2001, there were more than one million illiterate people in Venezuela; today, that country is an Illiteracy-Free Territory. With Cuba's advisement and the "Yes, I Can!" teaching method, 1,482,543 people learned how to read and write, 76,369 of them from indigenous groups.
- In 2001, Venezuela and Cuba began down the road of ALBA, and now Bolivia has joined, and others will join.

After the documents were signed, Fidel was asked by a Telesur network reporter how he felt, 45 years after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, about sharing his central revolutionary role with other presidents. The Cuban president was precise in his answer: "I feel like the happiest man in the world." He reiterated this idea at the massively attended event in the Plaza de la Revolucion this Saturday, April 29, topping off a day of solidarity, integration and revolution.

Culmination of a Special and Historic Day

In the Plaza de la Revolucion, where – as Chávez said – we were accompanied by Bolivarian winds, the winds of ALBA and the winds of Che Guevara who is with us again, Fidel exposed the double standard of the anti-terror campaign carried out by the United States; Chávez warned that the 21st century will be the end of the empire; and Evo noted that the time to reclaim the Americas had come, constituting a historic night of unity and hope for the hemisphere.

At 6:10 p.m., with more than 25,000 guests in place, the 29th came to an end, a day in which – as Chávez said – "one's emotions are stirred" because it is one of those groundbreaking days that take root in the collective memory and become revolutionary commitment.

Participants in the event included official visiting delegations, along with leaders of Venezuela's Bolivarian secondary schools and Bolivian social organizations; students from the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM); the International School of Sports; the new Latin American Doctors Training Program; and members of the Francisco de Miranda Venezuelan Social Fighters Front.

In addition, participants included doctors and technicians from the Henry Reeve International Contingent; Operation Miracle; engineers and technicians preparing to lend their services in Venezuela's Comprehensive Health Centers and young people involved in various programs of the Cuban Revolution.

Evo gave the first speech, and after thanking the Cuban and Venezuelan peoples and their top leaders, Fidel and Chávez, said that the time had come for unity, “a unity that is for life and for independence, and that is over and above any sectorial or regional interest.”

After recounting anecdotes from his early days as a revolutionary and as a person committed to the peoples and the Cuban Revolution, he affirmed that three generations of revolutionaries had come together in Havana and three revolutions: “the Cuban one, the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela and the Bolivian Revolution to liberate all of Latin America and the world.”

Evo noted that only by rescuing their natural resources will the peoples be liberated, and in that sense, he referred to the call he made for a Constituent Assembly for the refoundation of Bolivia, a Bolivia that “must stop being a beggar, even though oligarchic sectors are attempting to put up resistance.”

Moreover, the Bolivian president said that his country intends to nationalize not just its hydrocarbon resources, but all of its natural riches, to benefit the people.

“Our government will never abandon the struggle to return to the Bolivian people the resources that belong to them,” he emphasized. In that sense, he stated that he has a mandate to guarantee a democratic and social revolution in Bolivia to do away with the neoliberal model and de-colonize the nation’s riches. “I am sure that with the unity of the Bolivian people, we will defeat the exploiting oligarchy,” he affirmed.

He added that he is convinced that his people are not alone, just as Cuba is not alone either; it is accompanied by Venezuela and Bolivia, he said.

Regarding the agreements that were signed, he said that only the ALBA can confront and defeat the FTAA, and it is the only way to overcome colonialism and neoliberalism.

Thanks to Operation Miracle, which is the fruit of ALBA, more than 7,000 Bolivians have had their vision restored, and many Cuban doctors are already lending their services in his country’s provinces, he noted.

Finally, he used the opportunity to congratulate Fidel, in the name of the Bolivian people, for his upcoming 80th birthday, and – ahead of everybody else – presented him with three gifts, framed images using coca leaves of José Martí, Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara, and Fidel himself.

Bolivia Is a Commitment

President Hugo Chávez spoke next, and with his usual colloquial and impassioned tones, gave us a masterly class on Latin American history.

He wanted to begin by talking about Bolivia, which is, he said, “a commitment, a challenge, a unbridled love of freedom, of equality.” It is, he reiterated, “the heart of America and utopia made feasible.”

He noted that that nation was born as a project, as a dream, 180 years ago. The Bolivarian Revolution, which has declared itself to be anti-imperialist and socialist, he said, reaffirms its determination and decision to support Bolivia and its government in all of its goals.

Chávez had words of praise for the Andean country's incorporation into the ALBA just 24 hours after Evo's first 100 days in power.

With that incorporation, "we are moving onto another aspect of the ALBA, because it was he who proposed a new tactical piece: the People's Trade Agreement (TCP)," the Venezuelan president added.

The ALBA will continue to open the road to that new model of integration against the FTAA, against capitalism and against imperialism, he said.

"It is up to you, the young people, to see with your eyes the collapse of the U.S. empire, because this is the century that will see its end, the century of the birth of our new homeland, where we will all be free with greater happiness," Chávez concluded, not without announced that "our heroes have returned to the Americas."

Fidel Harshly Criticizes the Bush Administration's Double Standard

The event's closing remarks were given by Cuban President Fidel Castro who explained, with that brilliant didactic manner that characterizes him, what the ALBA means in terms of developing the human capital of our peoples.

"This agreement that we have signed today is the most ethical that has ever been signed. It is not for two or three who want to divide up their riches. We have the enormous power of just ideas," Fidel affirmed.

He referred to the new type of health professionals who are being trained, the generosity that characterizes them; to how it is no longer just Cuba that is training doctors, but Venezuela as well, and with unbeatable quality, and that in about 10 years, they will number tens of thousands.

Again, he reiterated the need for Chávez and now Evo to be careful, because "the enemy will not desist until it has taken your lives, because they know very well how to carry out silent assassination." Later, in referring to the continent's new reality, he predicted that "there is no way to prevent the emergence of new leaders."

He noted that the empire craved for power from early on, and noted how in 1929, they invaded Nicaragua and assassinated revolutionary leader Augusto César Sandino in order to impose Somoza, just as they did with Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and with dozens of other bloody, coup-plotting dictators throughout the years.

Likewise, he noted, they carried out the massacre of the indigenous people, beginning with the conquest and colonization, and it was the nascent empire that finished them off.

In that sense, he explained the validity of recalling those events on this day, April 29, in which the foundations of the ALBA are extended with Bolivia. It is an agreement that constitutes a check against the FTAA, which is nothing more than "a refined instrument of domination and that represents the tactics of the U.S. government for subjugating our peoples," he said.

He also referred to the other element that comes with the FTAA, and that is the military projection of the U.S. government, with its maneuvers in the Caribbean region, the establishment of military bases, the expansion of the imperial intelligence networks, and other prerogatives.

During another part of his speech, the Cuban president reiterated that Cuban doctors will be in Bolivia for as long as necessary and that Cuba will support the Bolivian Revolution in everything that it needs.

Finally, Fidel noted the double standard and two-faced morality with which the Republican administration of George W. Bush carries out its supposed anti-terrorism campaign.

With respect to that, he referred to the latest report by the U.S. State Department, which impudently accuses the Hugo Chávez government of being linked to terrorist Colombian organizations and, in Cuba's case, the document defines it as being a sponsor of that activity, along with Iran and North Korea.

The revolutionary leader harshly criticized the empire's hypocrisy on this issue, given that while attempting to portray Cuba and Venezuela as terrorist, the U.S. government negotiated for and obtained from former Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso a pardon for the terrorist and criminal Luis Posada Carriles and his henchmen, only to later allow him to illegally enter the United States, where it not only hid him but also never responded to Cuba's repeated public calls to say how and where he entered and who participated in that repugnant operation.

"It is impossible to pretend that Mr. Negroponte and his publicized intelligence agency with more than 30 offices, and the high-ranking officials of that government, didn't know where Posada was, one of the bloodiest terrorists of this hemisphere, the torturer and assassin of many Venezuelan revolutionaries, and one of the main individuals responsible for the blowing-up of a Cuban airliner in Barbados in October 1976," he said.

"Now, they don't know what they are going to do with Posada Carriles and while they look for a way to protect him, they are launching these ridiculous accusations against Venezuela and Cuba, while at the same time carrying out military maneuvers in the Caribbean to try to fill us with fear, something they will never achieve, because both of our peoples are determined to defend their freedom at any price," he affirmed.

The Cuban president clearly said he felt proud to be a friend of North Korea, the country of Kim Il Sung, and expressed the honor it represented to be friends with Iran and its heroic people.

Fidel noted that Cuba has been denouncing the preparations underway by U.S. administration to carry out aggression against Iran, and emphasized that in face of such arrogance and lack of common sense, it is worth asking in whose heads the destiny of the humanity lies, and the magnitude of danger to the human species itself.

With the support of those present, Fidel affirmed that "the yankees with their maneuvers in the Caribbean are not going to frighten anyone, because the children of Bolívar are courageous in any situation. I know about your human quality and your revolutionary spirit," he said.

Miguel Bonasso, Argentine parliamentary deputy, and former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, Sandinista candidate for the upcoming presidential elections in that Central American nation, were present during the entire day of continental revolutionary reaffirmation.

Socialist Voice #94, May 5, 2006

ALBA: Agreement for the Application of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America and the Peoples' Trade Agreements

Presidents Hugo Chávez Frías, on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Evo Morales Ayma, on behalf of the Republic of Bolivia and Fidel Castro Ruz, on behalf of the Republic of Cuba, meeting in Havana on April 28 and 29, 2006, have decided to sign the present Agreement for the creation of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and the Peoples' Trade Agreements of our three countries.

General Provisions

Article 1: The governments of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Republic of Bolivia and the Republic of Cuba have decided to take concrete steps toward implementing the process of integration, based on the principles contained in the Joint Declaration, signed on the December 14, 2004, between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba, which are hereby accepted and embraced by the Government of Bolivia.

Article 2: The countries shall elaborate a strategic plan in order to guarantee complementary products that can be mutually beneficial based on the rational exploitation of the countries' existing assets, the preservation of resources, the expansion of employment, market access and other aspects inspired in the true solidarity fostered by our peoples.

Article 3: The countries shall exchange comprehensive technology packages developed in their respective nations by the parties, in areas of common interest, which shall be provided for their use and implementation, based on the principles of mutual benefit.

Article 4: The countries shall work together, in coordination with other Latin American countries, to eradicate illiteracy in these nations, using efficient, tried and tested methods of mass application, which have been successfully used in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Article 5: The countries agree to make investments of mutual interest which could take the form of public, binational, mixed or cooperative companies, joint management projects or any other form of association that they decide to establish. Priority shall be given to the initiatives which strengthen the capacity for social inclusion, resource industrialization and food security, in a framework of respect and preservation of the environment.

Article 6: In the case of strategic binational or trinational companies, the parties shall do everything possible, the nature and cost of the investment permitting, to ensure that the host country hold at least 51% of the shares.

Article 7: The countries may agree to the opening of branches of state banks of one country in the national territory of another.

Article 8: In order to facilitate the payments and charges relating to the commercial and financial transactions between the countries, Reciprocal Credit Agreements shall be arranged between the banking institutions appointed by the governments to this effect.

Article 9: The governments may use commercial compensation mechanisms of goods and services, if and when this is mutually convenient for the extension and reinforcement of the commercial exchange.

Article 10: The governments shall promote the development of joint cultural projects which take into account the particular characteristics of the different regions and the cultural identity of the peoples.

Article 11: The governments shall reinforce cooperation in the field of communication, by taking any action necessary to strengthen their infrastructure capacities in respect of transmission, distribution, telecommunications, etc; and in respect of their informative, cultural and educational contents production capacities. In this regard, the governments shall continue to support the space devoted to integrationist communication created by Telesur, by increasing its distribution in our countries, as well as its contents production capacities.

Article 12: The governments of Venezuela and Cuba acknowledge the special needs of Bolivia as a country whose natural resources were exploited and plundered during the centuries of colonial and neo-colonial rule.

Article 13: The Parties shall exchange scientific and technical know-how with the aim of aiding the economic and social development of the three countries.

Article 14: Taking into account all of the above, the Government of the Republic of Cuba, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Government of the Republic of Bolivia, have agreed upon the following actions:

Actions to be implemented by Cuba as part of its relations with Bolivia in the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America and the Peoples' Trade Agreements

First: To create a non-profit Cuban-Bolivian entity which will provide free high quality ophthalmologic surgeries to all Bolivian citizens lacking the financial resources needed to cover the high cost of this service, thus preventing tens of thousands of poor Bolivians from losing their sight or serious and often crippling limitations to their sight each year.

Second: Cuba shall supply the most advanced technology equipment and the ophthalmologic specialists required in the initial stage who, with the support of young Bolivian doctors trained in the Latin American School of Medical Sciences (ELAM), working as doctors in residence, or other doctors and residents from Bolivia or other countries, shall offer attentive care to the Bolivian patients.

Third: Cuba shall pay the wages of the Cuban ophthalmologic specialists working in the framework of this action program.

Fourth: Bolivia shall provide the facilities necessary to render this service, be they buildings already used to provide healthcare or others adapted to this purpose. Cuba shall increase the

number of ophthalmologic centres donated from three, the number initially offered in the Bilateral Agreement signed on December 30 of last year, to six.

Fifth: The six centres shall be located in La Paz, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Sucre, Potosí and the town of Copacabana in the La Paz region. Together they shall have the capacity to operate on at least 100 thousand people each year. This capacity may be increased should the need arise.

Sixth: Cuba hereby reaffirms its offer to provide Bolivia with 5 thousand scholarships to train doctors and specialists in General Integral Medicine or other areas of Medical Science: 2 000 in the first quarter of 2006, who are now receiving basic training here in Cuba; 2 000 in the second semester of this year, and 1 000 in the first quarter of 2007. Over the subsequent years the established quota shall be replenished with new students. Included in these new scholarships are some of the 500 young Bolivians who are already studying Medicine in Schools of medical Science all over Cuba.

Seventh: Cuba shall prolong the stay of the 600 medical specialists who travelled to Bolivia as a result of the serious natural disaster which occurred in January of this year, affecting all the regions of the country, for as long as this sister nation deems necessary. Furthermore, it will donate 20 field hospitals equipped with surgical facilities, intensive care units, emergency services for patients suffering of cardiovascular accidents, laboratories and other medical resources, to be sent to the areas hardest hit by this disaster.

Eighth: Cuba shall continue to provide Bolivia with the experience, didactic material and technical resources necessary to implement the literacy program in four languages: Spanish, Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní, to be made available to all sectors of the population in need.

Ninth: With regards to the education sector, the exchange and collaboration plan shall be extended to offer help in the methods, programs and techniques of the educational process of interest to the Bolivian party.

Tenth: Cuba will share its energy-saving experiences with Bolivia and shall cooperate with this country on an energy-saving program that could yield significant convertible currency resources.

Eleventh: During the investment recovery period, any state investment, investments made by Bolivian mixed companies or even those made with Bolivian private capital in Cuba will be tax-exempt.

Twelfth: Cuba shall grant Bolivian airlines the same facilities provided to their Cuban counterparts, with regard to passenger transportation, freight to and from Cuba and the use of airport services or any other facilities, as well as the internal transportation of passengers and freight within Cuba.

Thirteen: The exportation of goods and services from Cuba may be paid for with Bolivian products, in the national currency of Bolivia or in other currencies mutually agreed upon.

Actions to be implemented by Venezuela as part of its relations with Bolivia in the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America and the Trade Agreements between the Peoples

First: Venezuela shall encourage extensive collaboration in the energy and mining sector, including: the institutional consolidation of the Ministry of Hydrocarbon and Energy and of the Ministry of Mining and Metallurgy of Bolivia, by way of technical and legal assistance; the increase in the supply of crude oil, refined products, LPG and asphalt, envisaged in the Energy Cooperation Agreement of Caracas, by the amount needed to satisfy the internal demand of Bolivia. Compensation mechanisms shall be established with Bolivian products so as to completely cancel all debts created by these services. Technical assistance for the Bolivian Fiscal Oilfields (YPFB) and COMIBOL shall also be established, as shall the development of projects to adapt and extend infrastructures as well as petrochemical, iron and steel and chemical and industrial projects, and any other form of cooperation agreed upon by the parties.

Second: During the investment recovery period, any state investment or investments made by Bolivian mixed companies in Venezuela shall be tax-exempt.

Third: Venezuela hereby reaffirms its offer to provide Bolivia with 5 000 scholarships in the different areas of interest for the productive and social development of the Republic of Bolivia.

Fourth: Venezuela shall create a special fund of up to 100 million dollars for Bolivia to use to finance productive and associated infrastructure projects.

Fifth: Venezuela will donate thirty million dollars to look after the social and productive necessities of the Bolivian people as decided by their Government.

Sixth: Venezuela will donate asphalt and an asphalt mixing plant to contribute to road construction and maintenance.

Seventh: Venezuela will notably increase the imports of Bolivian products, especially those that contribute to the increase of its strategic foods reserves.

Eighth: Venezuela will provide fiscal incentives in her territory to projects of strategic interest to Bolivia.

Ninth: Venezuela will provide preferential facilities to Bolivian aircraft on Venezuelan territory within the permissible limits of her legislation.

Tenth: Venezuela will place at Bolivia's disposition the infrastructure and equipment for air and sea transportation in a preferential manner in order to support the economic and social development plans of the Republic of Bolivia.

Eleventh: Venezuela will provide facilities for Bolivian public or joint companies to establish themselves for the transformation of raw materials, down river.

Twelfth: Venezuela will collaborate with Bolivia in research projects on biodiversity.

Thirteenth: Venezuela will support Bolivia's participation in the promotion of endogenous development nuclei, using the experience of Mision Vuelvan Caras.

Fourteenth: Venezuela will develop agreements with Bolivia in the field of telecommunications, which may include the use of satellites.

Actions to be developed by Bolivia in its relations with Cuba and Venezuela within the framework of ALBA and TCP

First: Bolivia will contribute the export of her mining, agricultural, agro-industrial, livestock and industrial products as required by Cuba or Venezuela.

Second: Bolivia will contribute to the energy security of our nations with its available surplus production of hydrocarbons.

Third: Bolivia will not charge utility taxes on any state or mixed venture investments formed between Bolivia and the Venezuelan and Cuban States.

Fourth: Bolivia will contribute its expertise in the study of native peoples, both in theory and in research methodology.

Fifth: Bolivia will participate together with the governments of Venezuela and Cuba in the exchange of experiences in the study and recovery of ancestral knowledge in the field of natural medicine.

Sixth: The government of Bolivia will actively participate in the exchange of experiences in the scientific research on natural resources and genetic agricultural and livestock patterns.

Actions to be jointly developed by Cuba and Venezuela in their relationship with Bolivia within the framework of ALBA and TCP

First: The governments of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba will immediately proceed to remove tariffs and other non-tariff barriers that apply to all imports within the tariff universe of Cuba and Venezuela whenever they apply to products originating in the Republic of Bolivia.

Second: The governments of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba will guarantee the purchase of amounts of oil-based products and other agricultural and industrial products exported by Bolivia, that may not have a market as a result of the application of a Free Trade Treaty or Treaties initiated by the government of the United States or by European governments.

Third: The governments of Venezuela and Cuba offer financial, technical and human resource collaboration to Bolivia so that a genuine national Bolivian State airline may be established.

Fourth: The governments of Venezuela and Cuba offer Bolivia their collaboration in the development of sports, including facilities for the organization and participation in sports competitions, and training centres in both nations. Cuba offers the use of her facilities and equipment for the control of anti-doping in the same conditions that are offered to Cuban athletes.

Fifth: The governments of Cuba and Venezuela, in coordination with Bolivia, will promote actions needed to support the just Bolivian demand for the unconditional cancellation of her foreign debt, since it constitutes a serious obstacle to Bolivia's struggle against poverty and inequality.

New economic and social measures may be added to this present Agreement by the three signing Parties.

Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba will struggle for the unity and integration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba will struggle for peace and international cooperation.

Evo Morales Ayma
President of the Republic of Bolivia

Hugo Chávez Frías
President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Fidel Castro Ruz
President of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba

Havana, April 29, 2006.

Socialist Voice #95, May 7, 2006

May Day 2006: Millions March, Boycott, Take Off Work and School for Immigrant Rights

By Barry Sheppard

San Francisco – Police estimates total 1.1 million immigrant workers and their supporters marched in over 75 major cities across the country. Many more participated in smaller cities and towns. Over and above those who marched were hundreds of thousands more who boycotted shopping, and skipped school or work.

Even accepting the police estimates, which are notoriously low, it's clear that millions participated in this historic May Day, the largest demonstrations ever seen in the United States.

In the San Francisco Bay Area there were huge marches. The largest was in San Jose, with hundreds of thousands in the streets. A massive march filled the main thoroughfare in San Francisco, ending in a giant rally at City Hall. Another march of 10,000 took place in Oakland. Even in the small city where I live, Hayward, there was a rally of 1,000.

The Bay Area was not unique in the spread of the actions to even the smaller towns and cities across the nation.

The cops said 500,000 marched in Los Angeles, and it was probably closer to one million. They said that 100,000 were on the streets of New York, and 400,000 in Chicago. In Denver, the official estimate was that one sixth of the total population was out. And so on.

One of the goals of the actions, which were called by the coalition that organized the huge march in L.A. on March 25, was to demonstrate the impact of a "Day Without Immigrants."

This goal was surely met. School attendance in cities with large concentrations of immigrants was way down. The New York Times reported "stores and restaurants in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York closed because workers did not show up or as a display of solidarity with demonstrators." In one area of Chicago only 17 percent of students showed up. There were TV pictures of empty supermarkets usually patronized by immigrants.

In California's Central Valley, where much of the country's produce is grown, no farm workers came to work. TV shots of the vacant fields were eerie. Much of the construction industry was shut down across the country. Major meatpacking companies, including Tyson Foods, Swift, and Perdue chickens, shut down many plants because their immigrant workers didn't show up. The largest port on the West coast, in Long Beach, California, was shut down, because the truck drivers were nowhere to be seen.

Vast swaths of service industries — hotels, restaurants, car washes, and so forth were affected. Nannies took a day off.

Workers who couldn't take the day off came to rallies after work.

Although the actions were predominately Latino, a feature of the day was greater participation of other immigrants — Irish, Polish, Korean, Chinese and Haitian to name a few.

May Day was a crushing refutation of the more moderate wing of the movement, who implored immigrants not to boycott, not to take off work or school. These forces, including Catholic Church, the leaders of the few unions who did support the action, the more conservative Latino organizations, were joined by capitalist politicians posing as friends of the immigrants, as well as editorials in the major press seeking to tone down the protest.

These same forces also didn't like the central demand of the marches, for the legalization of the 12 million undocumented, for "amnesty."

Most of the organized labor movement, to its shame, stood aside.

The militant thrust of the movement, which was at the same time very peaceful and jubilant, reflected that it is a grass roots movement which has sprung up around the country, built by Spanish language radio and newspapers, emails and web sites. It is not saddled with a bureaucratic leadership, although the more conservative forces and Democratic Party politicians are trying to co-opt it.

Another goal was to re-establish May Day in the U.S. Most Americans had not even heard before that May Day is celebrated around the world. The immigrants knew because it is celebrated in their countries of origin. For the first time, the media had to explain that May Day is the international workers holiday, although it steered clear of the origins of May Day in the 1886 fight in Chicago for the eight hour day, and its association with socialism and communism and militant workers' struggles.

Many of the immigrants who are coming to the U.S. from Mexico and Central and South America have been driven, ironically, by Washington's policies. Many have come as political refugees from places like Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, ravished by U.S.-sponsored wars.

U.S. imperialist penetration has impoverished tens of millions more who then are driven by desperation to risk life and limb to emigrate to the U.S. Imperialist "globalization" has intensified this trend in recent years. A case in point has been the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement on Mexican peasants, tens of millions of whom have been driven off their lands by competition with U.S. agribusiness. These displaced peasants congregate in the big cities to live marginal existences. Many try to find a way to get to the U.S.

In sympathy with their brothers and sisters demonstrating in the U.S. on May Day, many Mexicans boycotted U.S.-owned businesses like McDonalds. A march in central Mexico City was led by Zapatista leader Marcos in solidarity with May Day USA. He read off names of Americans he identifies with, beginning with the Haymarket Martyrs, who were executed for their part in the 1886 struggle, and including Eugene Debs, John Reed, Emma Goldman, Elizabeth Gurly Flynn, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and more. At the usually heavily trafficked border crossings in southern California, there was an eerie silence with no vehicles crossing from Mexico!

Some talking heads in the capitalist press have warned that the big immigrant demonstrations are creating a “backlash” in “middle America.” Nothing is further from the truth. The real bigots are frothing at the mouth, to be sure, but they have been pushed back. The movement has already shifted the discussion to the left, as tens of millions of ordinary Americans have seen the “illegal immigrants” as human beings for the first time, and have begun to hear their demands. It’s hard to hate working class families you see in the streets or on TV come out in their millions to demand simple justice.

Socialist Voice #96, May 9, 2006

Ontario's 'Sharia Law' Controversy: How Muslims Were Hung Out to Dry

By Richard Fidler

(April 28, 2006) "A lie can travel halfway around the world," the American writer Mark Twain once said, "while the truth is putting on its shoes." That statement could apply to the recent phony debate over "sharia tribunals" in Ontario.

Odds are that if you consulted the average man or woman in the street on the matter, you would learn that the largest province in Canada had come within an inch of allowing fundamentalist Muslims to institute mandatory "sharia" law, bypassing legislation designed to protect the rights of women and children, eliminating the separation of church and state, and possibly exposing Canadians to the harsh legal punishments found in some Islamic countries. The Muslim scheme, you would be told by many, was turned back only by a vast campaign spearheaded by secular Muslims, feminists, labor unions, and progressives who forced the government to retreat and to ban all resort to religious leaders or principles in resolving legal disputes. It was a great victory for progressive public opinion, a major defeat for reactionary Muslims.

That's more or less the official story, reinforced by the mass media and believed by many on the left, as well. But it is largely fictitious. And it is important to understand the true story, both because the issues at stake in this controversy may well arise in new and similar contexts and because the stench of the anti-Muslim prejudice stirred up by the "anti-sharia" campaign lingers on. The Islamophobic campaign against "sharia tribunals" has undermined efforts to build a firm alliance with Muslims and other minorities in the fight against imperialist war and domestic war-induced repression, much of it directed first and foremost against members of the Muslim community.

Was "sharia" law the issue?

Despite the claims by some participants, there was no issue involving criminal law or the kinds of state constraints on individual action that are subject to scrutiny by judges for compliance with the Charter of Rights or other human rights legislation. Rather, the issue was simply whether Muslims were entitled to avail themselves of procedures long available in Canadian law to any couple seeking to resolve difficult and intimate questions related to marital disputes and marriage breakdown.

Under Canadian law, couples are free to make their own arrangements both for cohabitation and for separation. In the latter case, where consensus and mediation prove impossible they may resort to private third-party adjudication, choose their own arbitrators, and apply any religious and cultural principles they wish so long as these do not harm others or conflict with the laws of Canada. Or they may decide to take the matter to court and let a judge decide. Which course they adopt is their choice, and no one else's.

Family law arbitration is strongly supported by family law lawyers, marriage counsellors and other professionals involved in resolving difficult marital issues. It allows disputes to be resolved in an atmosphere of privacy and confidentiality, drawing on the services of expert mediators and arbitrators chosen and trusted by the parties. Arbitration costs less and decisions are issued more quickly than in the court system, where proceedings may drag on for years.

Faith-based arbitration (FBA), conducted by members of minority communities and informed by religious precepts, has long been engaged in by some Jews, Christian evangelical groups and even some Muslims, until now without notable dissent. FBA is favoured in particular by couples for whom deeply-held religious precepts are vitally important to their personal culture and self-definition. Ontario Jews, for example, have been arbitrating family disputes in their Beth Din courts for over a century; such private arbitration has been recognized in Ontario law since the late 19th century. By using the procedures laid down in the Arbitration Act, the parties can have a court enforce the arbitration decision, thus ensuring that the terms of the decision are legally binding. The Act provides minimal safeguards to ensure free informed consent to arbitration.

The courts retain their power to intervene and set aside arbitration decisions, as they can separation agreements, where the “best interests” of children are not honoured or where the decision is “unconscionable”. Similar legislation now exists in a half dozen other Canadian provinces, all of it modeled on a draft law drawn up years ago by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada following extensive discussions.

The controversy in Ontario arose when a Muslim lawyer, Syed Mumtaz Ali, proclaimed his intention to establish a “shari’a court” that would function under the Arbitration Act, thus making its decisions, like all decisions under the Act, legally enforceable.

The campaign unfolds

Mumtaz Ali’s proposal was reported with great sensationalism by some media, most notably the Toronto Star. Media reports took as good coin his misleading reference to “sharia” and highlighted statements by a variety of groups who warned that “sharia tribunals” would impose patriarchal Islamic fundamentalist norms on vulnerable women and children. Although most of the opposition clearly reflected anti-Islamic prejudice, some critics, in an attempt to appear even-handed, discovered that they opposed arbitration altogether; many now professed a surprising confidence in the ability of the courts and judges to accommodate the private and intimate concerns at issue in marriage breakdown.

This “anti-sharia” campaign unfolded against a backdrop of anti-Muslim propaganda related to the Iraq war, the growing threats to Iran, and Israel’s ongoing repression of the Palestinians as well as Canada’s increasing military involvement in Afghanistan. (To sense the odour of the campaign, see the article below on the “anti-sharia” opposition.)

Ontario’s Liberal government, headed by Premier Dalton McGuinty, responded to this campaign by asking Marion Boyd, a former Attorney General in Bob Rae’s New Democratic Party government in the early 1990s, to carry out a broad consultation and make recommendations.

Boyd consulted a wide range of supporters and critics of faith-based arbitration. “Sharia law,” she concluded, was a misnomer when applied to the Ontario context. Even Muslim critics of FBA, such as the Canadian Council for Muslim Women, Boyd noted, distinguished between sharia and Muslim family laws, sharia being a much broader concept.

Most of the Muslim supporters of FBA, Boyd reported, thought Islamic family law was compatible with Canadian family law; what they wanted was to apply Canadian law using Islamic principles. They also acknowledged procedural defects in their existing informal arbitration procedures and saw compliance with the Arbitration Act as a means of overcoming these problems. (See below for accompanying article, “Faith-based arbitration – a Muslim Perspective.”)

Boyd endorsed this perspective and proposed a broad set of legislative reforms to enhance the quality of decision-making and ensure that parties to private arbitration of family law disputes (especially vulnerable women) would be more fully apprised of their rights under Canadian law. (For more on Boyd’s report, see “McGuinty’s Ban on Faith-Based Arbitration: No Victory for Women’s Rights”, *Socialist Voice* #52, October 9, 2005.)

Boyd’s 180-page report was endorsed editorially by the province’s major newspapers, including the Toronto Star. But it failed to stem the “anti-sharia” campaign. The media reported little about Boyd’s proposals while continuing to feature prominently the misleading propaganda of the opponents of FBA, who if anything became even more strident. The NDP broke with its former attorney general, denouncing her report and calling for an end to all family law arbitration. It was joined in this by many trade unions and civil liberties organizations. The Quebec National Assembly chimed in, unanimously voting to reject “sharia tribunals” even though no such proposal had been made in that province, where a distinct statutory regime quite different from Ontario’s governs family law.

Just as a real public debate on the substantive questions discussed in Boyd’s report was getting under way, however, Premier McGuinty chose the fourth anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks to announce that “there will be no sharia law in Ontario.” His brief statement was immediately greeted as a victory by FBA opponents. The Muslim threat to our freedoms had apparently been turned back.

Bill 27 – What does it really say?

Since almost no one was seeking to implement “sharia” – even Mumtaz Ali admitted to Boyd that using the Arbitration Act for a limited number of personal law issues is not the same as having a “system” of justice – it remained to be seen what McGuinty would do.

Although McGuinty’s September announcement was widely interpreted as rejecting all faith-based arbitration and Boyd’s approach, his government’s legislative response to the Muslim proposal – Bill 27, introduced in November – actually reflects a relatively subtle and nuanced appreciation of the underlying issues. It retains the option of private family arbitration under Ontario legislation. More significantly, while stating that family arbitration must be “conducted exclusively in accordance with the law of Ontario or of another Canadian jurisdiction,” Bill 27

does not, on its face, foreclose the application of Islamic or other religious principles by arbitrators in their interpretation of Canadian family law.

Bill 27 implements Boyd's major proposal, to make family mediation and arbitration agreements domestic contracts under the province's Family Law Act and thus subject to the same laws that cover separation, domiciliary and paternity agreements. All of these laws allow couples to make their own arrangements for property division, custody, and support of dependent children and spouses, etc. Such arrangements are subject only to court intervention where such agreements are "unconscionable" or contrary to "the best interests of the child" or where there was insufficient disclosure of significant assets or liabilities or a party did not understand the nature or consequences of the contract.

Bill 27 also adopts Boyd's proposal to add to the list of professionals required by law to report a child in need of protection "a religious official, including a priest, a rabbi and a member of the clergy; a mediator and an arbitrator" – implicitly acknowledging the role of religious officials in such capacities.

What the amendments will mean in practice is still not entirely clear, as much depends on the regulations yet to be enacted by Cabinet. These will cover such vital matters as the training and certification of arbitrators (e.g. will a law degree be required?), standard provisions of family arbitration agreements, etc. Until those regulations are enacted, the amendments are not yet proclaimed in force. And there is evidence that the McGuinty cabinet is consulting FBA opponents and not proponents as it grapples with these issues.

However, the bill's incorporation of Boyd's major proposals testifies to their basic reasonableness. More importantly, it underscores the irrationality – and, it must be said, Islamophobia – of much of the "anti-sharia" lobby. These critics, apparently satisfied with McGuinty's earlier disavowals of "sharia tribunals", appear to have paid little attention to the actual content of Bill 27. No surprise there. It was apparent from their attacks on "sharia tribunals" that few had made any attempt to understand what faith-based arbitration actually entails. The bill passed the legislature in February after only a couple of days of public hearings.

In part because the bill itself is silent on who may conduct arbitrations – it neither prohibits nor provides for the conduct of private family arbitration by religious authorities – the response by FBA proponents has tended to be uncertain and tentative. For example, all three Jewish organizations that appeared before the MPPs in committee were critical of the bill's ostensible ban on any arbitration not "exclusively" conducted in accordance with Canadian law. But they did not flatly oppose the new legislation and suggested some amendments.

Only two Muslim organizations made representations on the bill. One, the Muslim Canadian Congress, a secular Muslim group, supported the bill and said little about its contents. The other, the pro-FBA Canadian Islamic Congress, stated that it opposed the bill and confined its remarks to a general defence of faith-based arbitration without addressing any of the bill's specific provisions. In fact, to date there has been very little public reaction to the new legislation by pro-FBA Muslim organizations. Some have told me they are still considering their approach and weighing their options.

In my opinion, the dearth of public reaction to the bill by Muslim organizations also reflects the intimidating effect of the “anti-sharia” campaign on their community. The scars of the “anti-sharia” campaign will long endure. One of the most damaging results was the deep division it created between Muslims and the predominantly non-Muslim left and labour movement. Among the most outspoken opponents of FBA were the Canadian Labour Congress and the NDP. The anti-FBA campaign sharply undercut the developing alliance between Muslims and non-Muslims in the movement against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In effect, the Muslims were stigmatized by a phony campaign against “sharia” and FBA that had no real basis in fact or law. Yet none of the major anti-FBA critics has acknowledged their error.

In fact, the public debate on these issues, cut short by McGuinty’s September statement, never really resumed. Once Bill 27 was tabled, it was as if there was a conspiracy of silence between the government, the official opposition and the media (and even the NDP, while opposing Boyd and Bill 27, did not campaign against either). In effect, it appears to have been decided to allow FBA subject to certain constraints, but to pretend that the proposal had been defeated. At no point has any acknowledgement been made that allowing Muslims the choice to engage in faith-based arbitration of private family disputes was in fact generally consistent with good public policy. So the Muslims, having been savaged in the media and among wide layers of left and progressive feminist opinion, have been left to twist in the wind. Their stigmatization remains.

Some Canadian critics of “sharia tribunals”

Among the more moderate statements issued in opposition to the Boyd report was a “Declaration on Religious Arbitration in Family Law” that actually opposed all use of arbitration in family law issues. It was signed by more than 50 organizations, including the Canadian Labour Congress, the Ontario Federation of Labour, the YWCA, and many other women’s and feminist organizations. It stated that “even with Ms. Boyd’s ‘safeguards,’ the amendments she proposed would effectively put at risk decades of legal reform in keeping with an equality and equal rights framework.”

Many critics were more inflammatory. Among the most vociferous of the “anti-Sharia” opponents was Homa Arjomand, a Toronto-based transitional counselor and refugee from Iran. She is the Coordinator of the “International Campaign Against Shari’a Court in Canada,” which claims a membership of 87 organizations from 14 countries with over a thousand activists. Much of the material on its web site (<http://www.nosharia.com/>) is outrageously Islamophobic.

One such piece, by Elka Enola of the Humanist Association of Toronto, sketches a startling “Worst Case (but probable) Scenario” of the effect of allowing Muslim FBA, starting with “Stage One — Using the Arbitration Act, the Shari’a courts appear to get legal sanction” and ending with “Stage Three — Muslims now outnumber Christians and the majority rule of democracy is turned on its head as the majority Muslims make Shari’a the law of the land.” It concludes, “We must protect Canada from such a scenario.”

Not surprisingly, the Humanist Association of Toronto proclaimed Arjomand its “Humanist of the Year” in 2005.

More typical of the opposition, perhaps, is a pamphlet published by Rights and Democracy, the Montréal-based International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, a federal government-funded agency that promotes the Canadian government's "human-rights" agenda around the world and especially in countries where Canada intervenes militarily such as Afghanistan and Haiti. Entitled "Behind Closed Doors: How Faith-based Arbitration Shuts Out Women's Rights in Canada and Abroad," it is mainly a polemic against Mumtaz Ali's "sharia tribunals," a concept that Marion Boyd explained had little if anything to do with the reality of faith-based arbitration under the Arbitration Act. Like other such statements, the pamphlet condemns the Boyd report but fails to address her specific recommendations. And it is riddled with factual misstatements.

For example, it says: "While it is true that the Orthodox Jewish and Ismaili Muslim communities operate their own tribunals under the Arbitration Act, the vast majority of cases handled by both are commercial disputes. Furthermore, the Ismaili tribunal does not apply religious laws in arbitration." In fact, Boyd describes the Ismaili Muslim Conciliation and Arbitration Boards (CABs) in detail. She reports, citing their figures, that 63% of their cases are "matrimonial," 29% commercial, and 8% "other (including inheritance cases)." And she adds: "The CAB system is grounded in the ethics of the faith...."

"Behind Closed Doors" preaches reliance on Canadian courts and state institutions; it assumes that women will be victimized under any system of private law. The entire approach is paternalistic, opposed to choice for the oppressed. It is not hard to see why this is the favoured approach of Rights and Democracy, which implements such reasoning worldwide.

Faith-based arbitration – a Muslim perspective

[Excerpts from an article by Dr. Mohamed Elmasry, national president of the Canadian Islamic Congress. Full text at <http://usa.mediamonitors.net/content/view/full/1964>]

... [T]he term "Shariah-based arbitration" is a misnomer and the cause of much unnecessary and divisive confusion. The proposed implementation of Marion Boyd's recommendations was designed simply to establish parity for Muslims in Ontario who desire equal opportunity with other religious groups to participate in consensual faith based mediation and arbitration.

The real issue at hand is that governmentally recognized faith based arbitration could be regulated to everyone's benefit. It could establish standards for licensing and/or accrediting both men and women (yes, women!) mediators; and it could determine the number and makeup of arbitration teams. For example, a government-supported faith based arbitration system could determine that specific teams be assigned to Muslim community issues; perhaps a team consisting of an elder, an Imam, a woman, a Canadian-trained Muslim lawyer and a social worker....

Faith-based mediation and arbitration are as old as faith itself. Long before Canada existed as a modern state, our First Nations peoples practiced both styles of resolution and still do.

Seeking faith based mediation and arbitration is voluntary. If it is also regulated, participating arbitrators must document fully the fact that all parties involved are engaged in this process of their own free will, as a legitimate alternative to the secular civil court system.

Mediation is usually attuned to the conflicting wants and needs of two parties in family/marital disputes, while arbitration is concerned first with the rights of the opponents and their children, if any. Both processes, however, must follow the laws of the land — a provision made very clear by the Boyd Report but too often dismissed by its opponents.

Western culture has traditionally treated faith-based mediation and arbitration with suspicion. This is because the secular world generally views all conflicts as battles in which one side wins, only because the other side must lose. In such an adversarial culture, superior value is placed on holding one party (often male) wholly responsible for the conflict. Thus, agreeing to any form of mediation and arbitration, faith-based or not, is usually equated (often by women) with giving up one's rights, power and safety.

But faith, any faith, treats family conflict resolution first and foremost as a type of meditation; that is, restoring peace of mind to those who once shared a mutual partnership of peace within their relationship.

Faith-based mediation and arbitration in Islam are no different than in any other faith group. Along with their Jewish and Christian brothers and sisters, Muslims believe it makes perfect sense to engage in mediation (and meditation!) along with arbitration to resolve family matters, right here in Canada. Here are some key reasons:

1. In matters of family conflict, our Canadian legal system often does more harm than good, as it is based on the premise that in difficult times the other person becomes an adversary, or opponent. Our litigious society — aided and abetted by the professional legal system — has promoted the notion of winners and losers to an absurd degree. In most cases of family conflict, the “winner” may be awarded more money, or gain some satisfaction in being proven “right,” but the conflict has not been resolved, and may never be.
2. In family conflicts, one must deal with all kinds of pain. Faith based mediation and arbitration can inject a major dose of healing into the resolution process. But it is virtually impossible for secular Canadian courts or family lawyers to provide any amount of emotional or spiritual healing. Community leaders who practice faith based mediation and arbitration do not consider themselves lawyers, or marriage and family counselors (although they may be members of these professions), but rather see their roles as being primarily healing ones.
3. Faith based mediation and arbitration have the advantage of allowing the parties in a conflict to agree upon their selection of the impartial third party/parties and even the methodology of how to select those individuals. In Islamic family law, for example, both husband and wife can each select one or more persons to be on the mediation and arbitration panel.
4. Faith based mediation and arbitration cost the conflicted parties much less, both financially and emotionally, since conflicts are generally resolved much faster than if taken through the adversarial justice system. This offers a great advantage by freeing up seriously over-taxed court

resources, which have resulted in large case backlogs. For example, it now takes years to complete a divorce settlement anywhere in Canada. The negative financial, social, and spiritual impact on families of such extended delays is far too high. Some judges now advise Muslim couples to seek faith-based mediation and arbitration first before they will hear their pending divorce cases.

5. Mediation and arbitration, faith based or not, offer a positive forward step toward conflict resolution. They are complementary processes that should be an integral part of any justice system; they cannot be outlawed or dismissed.

6. Structured and professionally licensed faith based mediation and arbitration processes can provide valuable legal and social resources to faith-practicing Canadians, as well as potentially attracting many lapsed or non-practicing believers, from within and without all mainstream faith groups.

7. It is far better to regulate faith based mediation and arbitration and to accept them as an integral part of our Canadian justice system, than to reject their present and potential value by marginalizing or suppressing them.

September 15, 2005

Socialist Voice #97, May 21, 2006

Immigration Protests: An Inspiration for All U.S. Workers

National consciousness deepens militancy

by Fred Feldman

Editors' note: More than one million Americans of immigrant origin and their supporters marched, boycotted stores and stopped work on May 1st. The May Day demonstrations were the largest to date in a wave of protests and marches held across the United States in recent weeks. (See Socialist Voice #77) These protests have been sparked by draconian legislation — HR 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act — adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives in December 2005 and now before the Senate for final adoption.

HR 4437 will, among other effects,

- *criminalize undocumented immigration status by creating a new federal crime of “unlawful presence”. It would permanently bar the entire undocumented population (some 11 million persons), including 1.6 million children, from the United States;*
- *criminalize organizations and individuals assisting undocumented immigrants, by expanding the definition of “alien smuggling” to include assisting a person to remain or attempt to remain in the USA;*
- *require the Department of Homeland Security to detain all non-citizens apprehended along the border until they are removed from the United States;*
- *gut the federal courts' authority to review immigration matters; and*
- *turn many minor crimes into aggravated felonies, with the worst possible immigration consequences.*

In a related move, President George W. Bush on May 15 announced plans to deploy up to 6,000 National Guard troops along the boundary with Mexico to bolster existing drastic controls on immigration. Bush also said he will increase the size of the 6,000-member Border Patrol by a further 50 percent. “Free trade” in goods, services and capitalist investments are not to be matched by open borders for labor.

In the following article, a Socialist Voice reader in Newark, New Jersey, describes the impact of this legislative assault and the response to it by his coworkers, many of whom are among its direct targets. He also points to some significant features of the protest movement and its special importance to the labor and socialist movements.

NEWARK — In recent weeks millions of Latinos have demonstrated for the rights of immigrants. They are not marching for the American Dream. They are not demanding to be melted down in the melting pot. These protests have a nationalist and Latino/Latina thrust and

character. They are an assertion of their rights to be here, in the United States, as they are and as persons who belong to a people.

These are the biggest working class actions in the United States in decades. They are something new in the class struggle here. They deserve the support and solidarity of all working people.

The protests represent a thrust toward Latino power and also Mexicano power — the latter expressed especially in border states seized from Mexico in the mid-19th century, where significant Mexican-descent populations have lived ever since.

“Illegal,” as a blanket characterization of millions of workers in this country, is an American expression of untouchability. Of course, illegality — being in the USA without the authority of statutes or courts — is also a social reality, for these people live outside the rights conceded by U.S. law. They are, for the most part, workers who don’t have unions or have very weak ones, like mine at a fruit and vegetable-packing plant in Newark, across the Hudson River from New York City. The organizations they fight through are immigrant rights groups and other organizations, usually based in some ways on their national groups although sometimes on a broader Latino basis.

Protests buoy workers’ spirits

One of the fears these demonstrations evoke for the rulers is that at some point in a future raid on a meatpacking plant to round up “illegals,” a kind of Stonewall rebellion of illegal immigrants will result, somewhat like the revolt that erupted in New York City in 1969 when cops engaged in a routine raid on a gathering place of “illegals” (gay men) and set off a profound social explosion.

At my workplace in Newark, dozens of immigrant workers face dismissal for having used questionable social security cards — an accusation pressed on the employer by the government. Yet on May Day, when literally millions demonstrated in the streets of cities and towns throughout the United States, the vast majority of my Latino coworkers did not show up for work. The boss stormed about how “they are only hurting themselves” and set about training replacements — very unsuccessfully, I might add. But the Latino workers returned to work the next day more confident and in a much better mood.

My Latino coworkers appear to be organized to some extent, and have set things in motion legally and otherwise to try to defend their jobs and, more importantly, their right to remain here. Before the action, they seemed crushed and upset. Now they are calm and more confident. All were much more buoyed in spirit than they had been before the protest. The very fact that they were not driven into silence or intimidated into staying away from the protest was itself a big victory.

The primary demand of these Latino workers appears to be for “*legalización*” — not “open borders”, “amnesty,” or some more “radical”-sounding position. They do not consider themselves to be “illegal” as human beings. They want full recognition as “legal” by the U.S. authorities.

I think the workers of all nationalities where I work feel a little stronger today because of this self-assertion of the Latinos for their rights as immigrants. And this includes the Black workers, despite the mixed feelings some express about the possibility of getting more Blacks into jobs if some of the Latinos leave. Almost all the workers felt that having dozens of coworkers being forced out of their jobs and into the underground was bad news for all of us.

More than a labor struggle

There have been other big mobilizations, substantially working class and plebeian, of South Asians and Muslims against “war on terror” attacks on them: their culture, their religion, their rights, and simply for being who they are. It is of crucial importance that white radicals and all progressives stand with them, and in no sense be or seem to be above the battle. And it is important to understand that these protests are an expression of the nationalism of the oppressed.

The recent mobilizations followed the mighty action of the transit workers who shut down New York City in December 2005. This too was a predominantly nonwhite action, and its impact is still being felt even though subsequent developments have weakened the first surge of unity. There the ranks mobilized to create a more militant leadership that would also be an expression of Black power in and out of the labor movement. The gain for Black power in the election of Roger Toussaint, a Trinidadian immigrant, as the local union president strengthened the hand of all transit workers, the strike being in part one of the consequences.

And the government attacks on the union, including Roger Toussaint, will tend to reinforce determination to hold on to the ground they gained in achieving this change in their union. The power of the united workers in the strike that shut down New York City will not be lost on working people, despite the heavy sledding that the union has run into since.

The national question in the transit union — the national, and not just trade-union consciousness of the Black, Haitian and Chinese workers — is one of the big challenges the movement faces in figuring out how to advance the fight of that union.

The marches of Latinos and Latinas are a thrust into the United States of the worldwide resistance of the hundreds of millions of working people — farmers, peasants, unemployed, refugees, artisans and peddlars, homeless, student youth, etc. — who are threatened with destruction and increasingly mired in poverty and violence by imperialism today.

The anticapitalist and socialist movement in the United States has to be won politically to turn our activity and outlook more towards these people. In my opinion they are the future of real revolutionary organizations in every country. These are the people who have powered the Cuban revolution and the progressive changes now taking place in Bolivia and Venezuela. Our antiracist work, and, yes, our union work has to place them in the center of our thinking and strategizing, no matter where and with whom we work.

There is widespread discomfort on the U.S. left with the concept initially raised by Lenin that the nationalism of the oppressed has a general democratic content that revolutionaries support. But I believe this basic insight is vital for us today. We should support the nationalism of oppressed peoples in much the same spirit as we support the trade unionism and trade-union consciousness

of the exploited and oppressed working class, the feminist self-assertion and consciousness of oppressed women, the self-assertion and liberationism of gay people as gays. We must support not only particular demands for rights but movements and outlooks that shape these demands. We cannot identify with prejudices or divisiveness put forward in the name of nationalism, trade unionism, or feminism. But we must relate sympathetically to the progressive forward thrust of nationalism, feminism, and trade unionism as expressions and means of struggle of the oppressed and exploited.

A national question

Lenin's stance was the most profound shift on the national question in the history of the Marxist movement and reflected the rise of imperialism, the imperialist conquest of the world. It meant strategically looking at the struggles of oppressed nations from the standpoint of the oppressed themselves, and seeing oppressed peoples as central allies and actors in the working class struggle — not just in a trade-unionist sense as groups of workers fighting discrimination and not just as dependent allies, but as partners in the struggle for change.

Since Lenin's time revolutionaries have learned to leave abstract condemnations of “all nationalism” in the abstract to liberal “internationalists,” the right wing of the pacifists, and the flat-earth enthusiasts of imperialist globalization.

We don't support everything trade unions do. They collaborate with employers against their own members. They support Democratic politicians. They support imperialism. But workers need trade unions and trade-union consciousness, and we advocate and defend them as part of our socialist worldview.

However, we don't just support specific union struggles. We have a broader outlook than trade-unionism alone. We support trade unionism as a necessity for the working class that arises organically, both as consciousness and organized movement, out of the daily struggle. But nationalism and national movements arise the same way, out of the daily oppression and struggle of oppressed peoples.

The sharpest and clearest expressions of internationalism come from socialists and thinking working people taking sides in real struggles with the nationalism of the oppressed in the United States and around the world against our ruling class and against their “American” nation. This is fundamental to building an international socialist movement that can unite oppressed and exploited humanity in struggle. It means taking a stand on the side of the oppressed as peoples.

If we don't do so, we will tend toward economist and workerist analyses and approaches that look at the struggles of oppressed peoples and of the billions of black and brown and yellow of the earth from the outside and even above, and primarily from the standpoint of trade unionism, of the organized workers as the ordained leading layer.

Viewing the struggle “from below”

We will tend increasingly to have trouble when the struggles of oppressed nations and people come into conflict with trade unions. The Black and Puerto Rican struggles for community

control of schools in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s, and the teachers' union's savage struggle against these communities, were an example of what can happen.

It will be harder for us to stand unconditionally with Muslims against attacks on their peoples and cultures and nations, in which religion has been and is an important part of their self-definition and identity as peoples, even while we support the movements for progressive change among these oppressed peoples.

We need to start seeing the world not from the standpoint of strata that are better off, a little more secure, and not so combative, but from the standpoint of the millions in the world who are really being driven to struggle. It is important to remember that the trade unions, except during upsurges when they broaden out rapidly in membership, always tend to be made up of a relatively better off layer, in part simply because it is better to have a union than not to have one.

From the standpoint of the fight against the employers and their government, trade unionism is a "from below" outlook and movement. But relative to tens of millions of oppressed today, it can also sometimes become a perch from which the struggles of the most oppressed and exploited are criticized or even opposed in a "from above" spirit.

Socialist Voice #98, May 21, 2006

World Solidarity Needed for Bolivian People, Government

by Barry Weisleder and John Riddell

This article is reprinted with permission from the June 2006 issue of Socialist Action. That issue also contained a reply which we have posted on this website.

TORONTO — “General jubilation” greeted the Bolivian government’s move to take control of the country’s hydrocarbon resources on May 1, according to the Cuban daily newspaper *Granma*. “An impressive multitude (that) gathered to celebrate May Day” in La Paz, Bolivia’s capital, “exploded with joy and cheers” when these measures were announced. This joy was shared by opponents of imperialism everywhere.

The corporate media reacted with dismay and anger. “Bolivia’s Folly,” proclaimed the *Globe and Mail*, the most authoritative voice of Canada’s capitalist rulers. Bolivian president Evo Morales is “acting on his shopworn socialist notion,” the *Globe* warned. “It’s the first step down a dangerous road that will further alienate Bolivia’s business community ... scare off foreign investment ... and make it harder for the country to solve its deep-rooted structural problems.”

Why such alarm? Bolivia’s measures were not in themselves socialist. The government’s bid to exert popular control over petroleum reserves merely parallels the jurisdiction Canada’s government has defended since its creation in 1867. Bolivia’s demand that oil companies renegotiate extraction contracts on terms more favourable to the country’s people follows the example of Venezuela and other Third World oil producers.

But for the imperialists, the context is alarming. The Bolivian government’s measures carry out the will of a powerful mass movement that has in recent years repeatedly challenged the country’s capitalist rulers. Evo Morales is himself a product of this movement. His overwhelming election victory in December 2005 represented that movement’s success in striving to establish a popular government. And the petroleum takeover was not negotiated with the oil giants but presented as a *fait accompli* to a mass rally in La Paz.

The *Wall Street Journal* angrily branded this an example of “another Latin craze: the abrogation of contracts.”

Other moves have followed. On May 15, the Bolivian government ordered private pension funds to hand over \$700 million in oil company shares they had administered since the privatizations of the 1990s. The finance minister of Spain, where many of these funds are based, denounced this seizure “without compensation” as “unacceptable.”

Bolivia’s example is compelling. On May 16, Ecuador — also repeatedly shaken in recent years by indigenous-based mass movements — took over operations of U.S.-based oil giant Occidental Petroleum, a move that will bring the Andean country \$100 million a year in extra revenue.

Washington immediately retaliated by breaking off “free trade” talks with Quito. In Chicago on May 21, U.S. President Bush warned against the “erosion of democracy” in Bolivia and Venezuela. He darkly linked “prosperity and peace” to “respect for property rights.”

The ‘ALBA’ alternative

Bolivia does not stand alone. On April 29, its president signed a far-reaching Peoples’ Trade Agreement together with Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Fidel Castro of Cuba, at a meeting of the three presidents in Havana.

Bolivia also joined the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), the Venezuelan government’s plan to unite the peoples of Latin America around “the egalitarian principles of justice and equality,” to which Cuba subscribed in 2004.

The terms of the three-country agreement were sweeping, providing for massive Cuban assistance to upgrade health standards and launch a literacy program, \$130 million in direct Venezuelan financing, Venezuelan support for Bolivia’s petroleum industry, 10,000 scholarships in Venezuela and Cuba for Bolivian students, and many other measures.

There is more. In February, the United States succeeded in imposing on Colombia a “free trade” agreement that robbed Bolivia of the market for 60% of its vital soybean exports. Cuba and Venezuela responded by undertaking to purchase the entire available crop at favorable prices.

The *Wall Street Journal* now angrily terms Bolivia “a virtual Venezuelan colony flush with Cuban agents.”

Washington has so far focused its retaliation on Venezuela, carrying out threatening military exercises close to the Venezuelan coastline. On May 16 the U.S. State Department announced the politically significant gesture of an arms embargo against Venezuela in reprisal for that country’s relations with Cuba and Iran and its failure to “cooperate with the United States in fighting terrorism.”

Need for solidarity

Bolivia now faces the likelihood of a U.S.-sponsored campaign to destabilize and overthrow its government, similar to the military coup and other dirty tricks attempted against Venezuela in the last half-decade.

Progressive forces of every hue in Bolivia now have strong reason to rally behind their government in a united front against threats from imperialism and the Bolivian oligarchy, while continuing to press for radical measures to benefit the poor majority. And in the United States and Canada, the key task is to build a strong solidarity movement in defense of Bolivia and its two embattled allies.

During the first months of the Morales presidency, the Bolivian government acted slowly and cautiously, measuring its moves in an objective situation that is in many ways unfavorable. Bolivia is the poorest country in South America. It is landlocked, far from its allies. The army and police, which have a long tradition of acting to defend imperialist interests, are still intact.

The state apparatus is largely hostile. And the government is only now forging unity with the mass movements that brought it to power.

Moreover, neighboring South American countries, especially Brazil and Argentina, play a crucial role in Bolivia's economy, trade, and international communications. Brazil's Petrobras is the largest investor in Bolivian petroleum and the biggest loser in its assertion of state control over the industry. At the same time, the governments of Brazil and Argentina are in conflict with imperialism; they helped bring down the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. One of the Morales government's major achievements has been to avoid a breach with these two countries — a process in which Venezuela's support has been vital.

As Grenada's Maurice Bishop once observed, "The revolution is not like making instant coffee." For further radical measures to succeed, the Morales government must maneuver to secure the most favourable relationship of forces inside and outside Bolivia.

National liberation

Moreover, the Bolivian upsurge is not in the first instance a movement for socialism. It is a struggle for democracy and sovereignty on the part of a nation brutally oppressed by imperialism. The dominant characteristic of this struggle has been the efforts of Bolivia's long-marginalized indigenous majority to achieve full citizenship and to refound the nation on the basis of respect for indigenous people's culture and economy.

Marxism has long recognized the progressive character of such anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements, even if — like Cuba's July 26 Movement — they do not inscribe socialism on their banners.

Most of Bolivia's toilers are not waged employees but are independent producers — farmers, cooperative miners, artisans, traders, and peddlers. The government of Evo Morales aims to increase the viability of these family-based economic units. Such measures may include the provision of credits, infrastructure, social services, and marketing assistance. Such a program responds to the historic struggle of indigenous peoples in Bolivia to maintain and strengthen their particular *ayllu*, the aboriginal socio-economic structures in which land is not a commodity.

Workers' and farmers' government

The policy of state aid to independent producers forms part of the Marxist program. It has been long practiced by the workers' and farmers' government of Cuba. In Bolivia, this goal is sometimes called "Andean capitalism," a term that can be misunderstood outside its specific context. In fact, effective support for small-scale family and community enterprise is only possible when workers, farmers, and other independent producers take full control of the government apparatus and use it to rein in the power of the giant capitalist corporations.

Bolivia today may be taking initial steps toward constituting such a workers' and farmers' government. Bolivian President Evo Morales said April 5, "You can't transform things from the [presidential] palace. I feel like a prisoner of neoliberal laws." To escape this prison, his government is organizing an assembly to write a new constitution. "We captured the government," Morales said. "With the Constituent Assembly we want to capture political

power.” (Elections to the assembly, which is to redraft the country’s constitution, are to be held in July.)

Morales is on the right track here. Winning the presidency gives Bolivia’s popular movements at best only a small fragment of political power — a toehold. Bolivian working people need full control of the governmental apparatus and the armed forces. Only a government of working people, reflecting the will of the indigenous majority of the nation, can carry through the “profound democratic and anti-colonial revolution” recommended by Bolivia’s vice-president Alvaro Garcia Linares.

Solidarity from within the imperialist countries will help win for the Bolivian people the time and freedom of action needed to press this process forward.

Chavez’s Challenge

There is another vital aspect to the challenge of Bolivia, Venezuela, and Cuba. The leaders of these three countries are challenging us to join in a worldwide movement for social justice. They are awakening new interest in the idea of socialism — including among working people in Canada and the United States.

Hugo Chavez made such an appeal following the May 10-12 European Union-Latin American summit. At the Vienna summit Chavez and Morales squared off against the presidential figureheads of imperialist Europe, acting as a tightly coordinated team – sporting two flags, but fighting for a common cause.

Addressing a solidarity rally of 5,000 in Vienna, =Chavez quoted the words of Rosa Luxemburg, “The choice before humanity is socialism or barbarism.” Chavez continued, “When Rosa Luxemburg made this statement, she was speaking of a relatively distant future. But now the situation of the world is so bad that the threat to the human race is not in the future, but now.”

Chavez recalled his youth — the time of the May 1968 upsurge in France, the Beatles, and the movement against the war in Vietnam. “We looked to the future and we thought that by the year 2000, the world would be a different place, a better place. But the years have passed and instead of improving, things have gotten worse.

“What has happened? Imperialism and capitalism have stolen my future. And now that I am in my fifties, I am convinced that people of my generation must spend every day, every hour, every minute of our lives fighting for a better world — a world free from poverty, inequality and injustice.

“That world is called socialism! I believe that only the youth have the necessary enthusiasm, the passion, the fire, to make the revolution. Let us unite to save the world. Together we can succeed!”

To socialists around the world, Chavez’s now oft-repeated appeal is the realization of a long-deferred dream. The bold nations of ALBA are placing the struggle for socialism back on the agenda for the world’s peoples. Our response should be wholehearted and vigorous solidarity.

Note: The quotation from Hugo Chavez at the Vienna rally, which was organized by Hands Off Venezuela, is from the HOV report that appeared at Venezuelanalysis (www.venezuelanalysis.com). –BW and JR

Socialist Voice #99, May 30, 2006

Which Road for the Bolivian Revolution? A Response to Comrades Riddell and Weisleder

By Gerry Foley and Jeff Mackler

This article is reproduced with permission from the June 2006 issue of Socialist Action newspaper. It replies to "World Solidarity Needed for Bolivian People, Government," by Barry Weisleder and John Riddell, which appeared in Socialist Voice #98. Gerry Foley is international editor of Socialist Action newspaper, and Jeff Mackler is national secretary of Socialist Action (U.S.).

Socialist Action (U.S.) recognizes the need to vigorously defend the Bolivian people against U.S. imperialist pressures and intervention. This is nothing new for us.

We are well aware of the history of imperialist intervention in Latin America in the past in which even the most moderate bourgeois reformist governments have been violently overthrown by the reactionary local ruling classes and their armies, supported by the imperialists.

Moreover, the Trotskyist movement, of which we are part, has a proud tradition of defending all reforms that weaken the hold of imperialism and advance the cause of the oppressed and exploited.

Leon Trotsky himself, when he lived in Mexico, was favorable to the nationalization of the Mexican oil industry by President Lazaro Cardenas. But Trotsky explained that it was not a socialist measure and that such steps toward economic independence from imperialism could ultimately be defended only through revolutionary struggle by the masses.

Trotsky likewise refused to give political support to the bourgeois Cardenas government. Two years after the oil nationalization, Cardenas supported the election of Avila Camacho as his successor, who began the liquidation of the reforms of the earlier Mexican revolutionary period.

The long experience of defeats of reform efforts in Latin America has shown that the local bourgeois reaction and imperialist intervention can only be challenged definitively if the workers and the poor masses are mobilized for a socialist transformation of the economy wherein the ruling capitalist institutions are destroyed and replaced with new mass institutions of workers' rule.

The army and the bourgeois state structures are central to capitalist power. They were smashed by the revolutionary action of the Cuban masses with the defeat of the Batista dictatorship in 1958. This is the starting point in understanding the survival of the Cuban revolution, as the Cuban publicist Celia Hart has so eloquently and repeatedly explained.

This is why the maintenance, extension, and consolidation of anti-imperialist reform in Bolivia depends essentially on the advance of the mass movement within the country. Moreover, the most effective and immediate solidarity with the Bolivian masses will be that offered by the

working classes of the neighboring countries, if they are inspired by the example of the victories of their Bolivian brothers and sisters won through the exercise of their own independent power.

In the imperialist countries, effective solidarity with anti-imperialist measures in dominated countries does not require an uncritical attitude to reformist or bourgeois nationalist regimes—quite the contrary.

It is with respect to this question that Comrades Weisleder and Riddell part company with us. Their approach is summed up in a paragraph under the headline “Workers’ and farmers’ government.”

They assert, “The policy of state aid to independent producers forms part of the Marxist program. It has been long practiced by the workers’ and farmers’ government of Cuba. In Bolivia, this goal is sometimes called ‘Andean capitalism,’ a term that can be misunderstood outside its specific context. In fact, effective support for small-scale family and community enterprise is only possible when workers, farmers, and other independent producers take full control of the government apparatus and use it to rein in the power of the giant capitalist corporations.”

Riddell and Weisleder conclude: “Bolivia today may be taking initial steps toward constituting such a workers’ and farmers’ government.”

The term “workers’ and farmers’ government” has been used in three ways in the Trotskyist movement, none of which correspond to the use that Weisleder and Riddell make of it. A workers’ and farmers’ government can be the first phase of a revolution before the ownership of the basic industries has been transformed. It can be the result of a revolution that destroys the institutions of the state without being led by a party with a program of socialist revolution. Or it can be a synonym for a workers’ state, a state that has abolished capitalism and is beginning to build socialism.

All of these variants presuppose the destruction of the bourgeois state institutions. A prime example is the 1949 Chinese Revolution, where in the first phase, the Stalinist-led Communist Party defeated the Chiang Kai-shek-led Kwomintang government and army, but pledged to preserve capitalist property relations. What emerged was a highly contradictory state based on a new government that essentially excluded the capitalist class and significantly defended the interests of China’s peasant masses.

With the U.S. intervention at the start of the Korean War, the Stalinist-led Chinese CP, which had originally sought a rapprochement with Chinese capital, formally nationalized all capitalist property and created a workers’ state.

The 1963 Algerian Revolution, in which an anti-imperialist armed organization, the National Liberation Front (FLN), came to power after a long and deep-going military and political struggle, also constituted a workers’ and farmers’ government, wherein the previous instruments of class rule were shattered by the revolutionary action of the worker and peasant masses.

The first phase of the Cuban Revolution, after the triumph of the rebel army and the dissolution of the initial and short-lived bourgeois government of Manuel Urrutia, was similarly a workers’

and farmers' government. Realizing that even the modest democratic program of the July 26 Movement, centering on a thoroughgoing land reform, could not be achieved within the framework of capitalism, the Fidel Castro-led government responded to a series of imperialist provocations and armed invasion by abolishing capitalist property and establishing a workers' state.

In all three instances, the workers' and farmers' government was a highly unstable and temporary formation resulting from the revolutionary destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus and its repressive forces, the army and police. This phase was largely unplanned and a reflection of the initial lack of clarity of the revolutionary leadership.

In the case of China, the Maoist-Stalinist leadership consciously resisted a social transformation while maintaining its political and military control of the country. In the case of Algeria, the anti-imperialist workers and farmers government of Ahmed Ben Bella was overthrown by a military coup backed by the bourgeois Arab states. In Cuba, the revolutionary leadership team headed by Castro consciously moved to establish a workers' state.

The choice before the revolutionary governments became evident; either move forward to abolish capitalist property relations, distribute the land, and begin the process of fundamental social reform or resist all of the above and re-establish the state on the basis of the old system of private ownership and the exploitation and oppression of the masses who had fought for the revolution.

In the case of the October 1917 Russian Revolution, the class nature of the state was immediately transformed with the Bolshevik victory. The new state power resided in elected councils of workers and peasants, or "soviets," established throughout the new Soviet Republic. The old bourgeois state was smashed and replaced with the world's most democratic system of workers' rule.

Here, the use of the term "workers' and farmers' government," as used by Lenin and Trotsky, was synonymous with a workers' state.

The Morales government and party clearly have been bourgeois formations from the beginning and remain so. The government includes conservatives, even figures who played major roles in the privatizations carried out by the previous neoliberal governments.

Evo Morales' party, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), is a bourgeois electoral machine. In this respect, Comrades Weisleder and Riddell seem to be misinformed. Morales and his party are not products of the gigantic mass movements in Bolivia in 2003 and 2005. They played very little role in them.

Morales even lent a certain support to the bourgeois Carlos Mesa government, which was overthrown by the 2005 upsurge. The victory of Morales and the MAS in the December 2005 elections was a product of the mass movements only in the sense that the former were able to profit from the radicalization that these movements impelled because the social organizations that led them, the Los Altos formations and the Bolivian Workers Confederation (COB), were unable to offer an alternative in the elections.

Comrades Weisleder and Riddell do recognize that the bourgeois state and army remain intact. They also recognize that there is nothing socialist in the Morales government's measures. (In fact, the so-called oil nationalization was even hailed by the right-wing French president, Jacques Chirac.)

In offering an agrarian reform, moreover, the Morales government is promising not to nationalize any land belonging to the big landowners, who own 90 percent of the productive land. The only land under consideration for distribution is idle state-owned land.

The Morales government's welcoming Cuban doctors is certainly discomfiting to the U.S. imperialists, but Cuba has sent doctors to a number of poor countries without that leading to any break of these countries from imperialist domination. So, where is there even a shadow or an intimation of steps toward the destruction of the bourgeois state, leading to the formation of a "workers' and farmers' government"?

It may be that Weisleder and Riddell hope that the Constituent Assembly, which will be elected this month and convene in August, will produce such steps. But the framework of its election so far seems to be a bourgeois electoralist one. Representatives will be elected by large districts. Organizations of toilers and indigenous and poor communities will not be represented as such.

Morales' vice president, Alvaro Linera, the inventor of the term "Andean capitalism," which Comrades Weisleder and Riddell argue is misleading (presumably believing that it does not mean what it says), is promising that the Constituent Assembly will leave the bulk of the Bolivian constitution unchanged.

And if Morales and the MAS intend to transform the nature of the state or establish a workers' and farmers' government in Bolivia through the Constituent Assembly, why have they set the rules of its elections in the traditional bourgeois electoralist framework?

Of course, there may be surprises when the Constituent Assembly is finally elected and when it begins to make decisions. The political climate in Bolivia following two near insurrections in the last four years is quite volatile. In fact, when Morales failed to nationalize oil and gas immediately after his election, his approval rating in the polls dropped precipitously, threatening his control of the Constituent Assembly elections.

This was a more immediate threat to his government than any threat to Bolivia's soybean exports. In fact, the demand for soybeans on the international market is very strong. That in part explains why less land has been distributed to the peasants under the Lula government in Brazil than under its neoliberal predecessor. The Brazilian agrarian reform, like the Bolivian one, is restricted to distributing unused land. And with the increased demand for soy beans, the landlords now want to use all the available land.

At this time there is absolutely no indication that Morales intends to take any "steps toward a workers and farmers government." If, of course, he or the MAS or the Constituent Assembly propose any steps to begin to dismantle the bourgeois state, Socialist Action (U.S.) will certainly defend them. But we will continue to analyze the process of radicalization critically, looking at both its advances and limitations.

The central question remains: Is Morales pursuing a revolutionary strategy? If he is, there is no way he can conceal it. By the same token, efforts to attribute revolutionary intentions to leaderships or governments that do not merit them have a very bad history. They can amount to an apology for reformism, and can serve to mis-educate and disorient revolutionary cadre, both inside Bolivia and internationally.

Riddell and Weisleder state, “And the government is only now forging unity with the mass movements that brought it to power.” To be accurate, Morales and his party did not participate in the struggles led by the mass organizations that began to challenge bourgeois power, and now that Morales and the MAS have governmental power, they are trying to take them over!

In regard to the Cuban government’s favorable response to Morales’ victory and his nationalist turn, it is clear that this event has offered the besieged Cuban Revolution more breathing space—and we rejoice with the Cuban leaders for that. But the Cubans also understand that while they must take full advantage of every new opening, only new socialist revolutions will relieve their isolation and the inevitable pressures they face at home. That is qualitatively more important than any immediate diplomatic gain or the scoring of political points on the international level.

Weisleder and Riddell correctly quote Maurice Bishop’s well-worn maxim, “The revolution is not a cup of instant coffee.” But necessary “maneuvers” aside, neither can a revolution succeed without satisfying the basic needs of the masses and without their active participation as history’s agents.

Riddell and Weisleder diverge with us further when they assert that “the Bolivian upsurge is not in the first instance a movement for socialism. It is a struggle for democracy and sovereignty on the part of a nation brutally oppressed by imperialism.

“The dominant characteristic of this struggle has been the efforts of Bolivia’s long-marginalized indigenous majority to achieve full citizenship and to refound the nation on the basis of respect for indigenous people’s culture and economy.”

To the contrary, the Bolivian masses rose to challenge their bourgeois government’s selling water rights to imperialist corporations and again to demand the nationalization of the natural gas resources of the country. They formed workers’ assemblies and recalled the revolutionary experience of Bolivia’s heroic trade-union movement led by the tin miners, heavily influenced by Trotskyism, when the working class vanguard reached a stage of near insurrection in the 1950s.

Riddell and Weisleder come dangerously close to counterposing to Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution the so-called two-stage theory of revolutionary development, wherein the backwardness of Bolivia is posited as precluding a path of socialist development. We prefer the course of the Cubans, who quickly came to understand that their revolution would either proceed to the abolition of capitalist property or there would be no revolution at all.