

NEW SOCIALIST

NOV/DEC/JAN 2004/2005 NO. 49 \$2/\$3 NEWSSTANDS

Venezuela: Victory Against Imperialism
Update on HERE Workers • Workers Without Work
Achcar on Imperialism • US in trouble in Iraq?

EDITORIAL

For militant class-struggle unionism

With the victory of the Republican party in the US, hopes were dashed for many who thought that Americans would reject the destructiveness of Bush's efforts to ride the American elephant as the cowboy of freedom trampling over the world. When more people than ever scratch their heads about life in the US, one often hears remarks that the situation in the Canadian state is much better. One even hears of people considering escaping the Bush agenda by moving north of the border.

These feelings of frustration are very valid. However, it is a mistake to think that the situation is much better in the Canadian state. It is also a mistake to think that opposition to war and other reactionary politics can be based primarily on decisions made at the polls. Historically, such opposition was rooted in a union movement that gave people a glimpse of a different vision for organizing society. Bush's victory is another sign of the weakness of the organized working class in the US. A look at the state of labour struggles here forces us to draw the same conclusion about the Canadian state.

For instance, the middle of October 2004 saw a rare example of a pan-Canadian strike, but also the all too common example of how not to strike. For the first time since 1991, all the components of the main union for federal government workers, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), walked off the job. The strike was a response to an offer of wage increases below the rate of inflation and employer demands to weaken leave rights. With some 125,000 members and a presence in all the provinces of Canada and in Quebec, PSAC had the potential to win its demands from a minority federal government that had just announced it had run a \$9.1 billion surplus in the previous fiscal year. PSAC could have drawn a lot of support by simply making the case that all workers deserve raises above the rate of inflation, that demands to give up rights that workers already have are unacceptable, and that the government was committed to paying down the debt at the expense of those who deliver and use public services.

But instead of pan-Canadian action that bolstered working people's resolve, we saw yet another example of how not to strike. PSAC officials undermined solidarity by having the 25,000 workers at the Canada Revenue Agency return to work before these members had ratified their contract and while the rest of PSAC was still on strike. Some 4,800 Parks Canada workers, who had been on strike for two months, also settled separately. Then the PSAC brass directed the rest of the members to return to work, but asked them to reject the government's last offer. This was truly a ridiculous course of action: end the collective solidarity of the picket lines and then ask workers who are back on the job to reject an offer and work without a contract.

It's hard not to think that PSAC officials really wanted members to accept the deal but didn't have the nerve to ask them to do so.

When unions act like this, we shouldn't be surprised that so many workers show no enthusiasm for the labour movement, or believe in the possibility of meaningfully transforming their lives for the better. While union membership remains steady at around three in ten workers, the high rate of unionization among public sector workers (72%) helps hide the slow decline of union coverage in the private sector: 18%, down from 26% two decades ago. The percentage of women in unionized jobs, despite growing significantly in the 1970s, is not much higher today than it was in the late 1980s. Although the gap between unionization rates of women and men has nearly disappeared, this is mostly because there are more women working in the public sector than in the unionized private sector and does not reflect new initiatives to organize women workers in the private sector. This trend is also shaped by the declining percentage of men in unions.

The PSAC experience highlights what New Socialist has always argued: the union movement needs to be changed from the bottom-up. Workers still sometimes attempt to use their unions to struggle for their needs. Clashes between workers and employers and the state - like the important strike by BC hospital workers in the spring of 2004 - have the potential to radically change how working people see themselves and society.

But, as articles in this issue discuss, unions have been locked into a bureaucratic straightjacket by state power. Most union officers and staff accept and even defend these restraints. Many are committed to close collaboration with employers. Most of the labour officialdom has come to accept neoliberalism and just wants a better deal within it -- as indicated by Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti's widely-reported comments in September about wanting to work with free trade.

For these reasons, efforts by groups of unionists to organize themselves to fight for more democracy, militancy and solidarity within their unions have never been more important. These efforts can lead not only to important gains in peoples' workplaces, but in doing so can also open up the possibility of broader community struggles and the real feeling that reactionary trends like the US's imperialist agenda or Canada's support for it - see the article on the weaponization of space inside - can be stopped. New Socialist will continue to publicize and support all such initiatives. We have no doubt that building a new kind of working-class movement rooted in workplaces and communities is a long-term project. It is also a critical one, for the future of this and every other society will be shaped by the course of class struggle against a capitalism that is wreaking havoc on people and the natural environment. ★

NEWSOCIALIST



Box 167, 253 College St.
 Toronto, ON M5T 1R5
 (416) 955-1581
 newsoc@web.net
 www.newsocialist.org

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EDITORS

Todd Gordon
 Sebastian Lamb
 Harold Lavender
 Nick Scanlon
 Tony Tracy

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES

Richard Banner
 Jackie Esmonde
 Denise Hammond
 Clarice Kuhling
 Alex Levant
 Morgan MacLeod
 David McNally
 Dana Milne
 Frances Piper
 Sandra Sarner
 Hamid Sodeifi
 John Simoulidis
 Shiraz Vally
 Ingrid Van Der Kloet
 Jeff Webber

DESIGN & COVERS

Ryan Chereваты (Cover Design)
 Jonah Ginden (Cover Photo)
 Sandra Sarner (Design/Layout)

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LETTERS



THE KOMAGATA MARU

An important event in Canada's racist immigration history

RE: SEPT/OCT 2004 ISSUE #48

On page 36 of the last issue you have a cutline below a picture stating that the Komagata Maru was carrying "376 Sikh passengers." This is an oft-repeated but still inaccurate description of the passengers of the Komagata Maru in 1914.

While the 376 passengers were all Punjabis, they were not all Sikhs. The evidence we have is that the 376 passengers also included 12 Hindus and 24 Muslims. The British Columbia press at the time referred to "Boat Loads of Hindus" and a "Hindu Invasion," in keeping with the then-common practice of referring to people from India simply as Hindus. We need to be careful not to make a similar mistake in the way we refer to Punjabis today.

Your cutline also says that the ship was turned back without any provisions. I think this is also inaccurate. Even then there was a significant Punjabi population in Vancouver and it raised much money to support and feed the detainees on board the ship. The detainees themselves also fought off a police boarding party and refused to leave Vancouver harbour until they were properly provisioned.

The ending of the account of the Komagata Maru took place elsewhere in the British Empire. British authorities refused the ship landing rights in both Hong Kong and Singapore before it reached India, where the British Administration continued the mistreatment of the migrants.

Nineteen of them were killed by British troops while they were being detained in India, where it was thought that their experience being told and retold throughout the country would lead to anti-British agitation. Of course, the migrants did come to play a significant role in debunking the imperialist myth of British "fair play and justice" - which had never had that much currency in India anyway. The last piece of information to add about the experience is the refusal of the former Hindu Nationalist BJP government of India last year to acknowledge the Komagata Maru migrants as a part of the freedom movement, or in any way related to the freedom struggle. This narrow view ignores how the experience of migration can politicise the oppressed and their allies, and certainly reminds us how history remains a terrain of struggle for all of us.

Thanks for the opportunity to respond about an important event in both Canadian and South Asian history.

In solidarity
Patrick Barnholden
Sudbury, Ontario

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ALL PRICES IN CANADIAN DOLLARS

THE RAND FORMULA

Heart and soul of the labour movement?

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB

As people who have worked in unionized workplaces in Canada know, union dues are automatically deducted from your pay-cheque, along with CPP and EI contributions. Everyone covered by a collective agreement negotiated between a union and management must pay union dues, although no one is obliged to join the union.

This practice – “the Rand Formula” – dates back to 1946. Ivan Rand was a judge appointed as an arbitrator to come up with a settlement to resolve a 99-day strike by 10 000 Ford workers in Windsor, Ontario. In late 1945 these auto workers had struck for a “union shop” (requiring all workers to join the union) and “check-off” (compelling the employer to deduct union dues from pay-cheques and hand them over to the union, relieving union activists of the time-consuming task of collecting dues from each member). They used mass direct action against the intransigent anti-union employer: mass pickets, shutting down the Ford plant power-house, and a car blockade of the plant.

Solidarity strikes by about 8 500 other workers from some 30 establishments and the threat that such strikes would spread across Canada made it too risky for the government to try to smash the strike with repression. But by promising not to send in troops the federal Liberals were able to get key labour leaders to agree not to escalate the struggle. Then the government convinced the company and the union to let Rand settle the dispute.

Rand ruled that Ford workers did not have to join the union, but that they all had to pay dues to it, since they all benefited from the fruits of collective bargaining. He also granted the check-off. For its part, the union was required to not only disown



Top: The 1945 Ford Windsor strike was instrumental in introducing the Rand formula. Right: Ford's first cheque to UAW Local 200 for automatic check off.

strikes that happened during the term of a contract (wildcats) but also to discipline members who took part in them. If the union failed in its duties, the company could withhold the dues it collected from members.

This “Rand Formula” spread far beyond Ford. It was later incorporated into labour law so that today it applies in almost all unionized workplaces – a distinctive feature of organized labour in Canada. It has generally been accepted by employers and right-wing parties, although hard right ideologues like those of the Fraser Institute and *National Post* columnists fulminate against it.

This past August, the youth wing of the Quebec Liberal Party passed a motion calling for the abolition of the Rand Formula. It will be discussed at the Quebec



PHOTOS: WINDSOR PUBLIC LIBRARY

Liberals' convention in November. The National Union of Provincial and General Employees (NUPGE) quickly responded. Noting “a warning that Canadian labour must take seriously,” it issued a statement that called the Quebec Young Liberals' proposal an attack on “the basis of Canadian trade unionism.” It warned that the governing party in Quebec will soon “debate the abolition of what amounts to

See BUREAUCRATIZATION: Page 34

Sebastian Lamb is an editor of *New Socialist*.

WORKERS WITHOUT WORK: *Building a unified low-income peoples' movement*

BY JACQUIE CHIC

For low-wage workers in Canada and around the world, jobs are increasingly precarious. This is the reality of capitalist labour markets where workers are compelled to move from one short-term contract to another. Benefits are non-existent and often the work is dangerous. For the most part, it is women, people of colour, people living with disabilities, recent immigrants and Aboriginal people who are in this frightening predicament.

The statistics are sobering. Based on the latest Census data, Statistics Canada reports that in 2001, compared to the early 1990s, the proportion of high income earners making more than \$100,000 rose from 1.8 to 2.7 per cent of all earners. At the same time, 41 per cent of all workers and 17 per cent of all full-time, full-year workers made less than \$20,000. Recent immigrants' income significantly declined compared to the Canadian average between 1990 and 2001. The gender gap also stubbornly hung on with men making up 84 per cent of all high earners in 2001.

Those are the workers who have work. When work can't be found, low-wage workers are forced to navigate an income security system designed to restrict eligibility for meagre "benefits." A mere quarter of unemployed workers in Ontario qualify for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits. Unemployed workers denied EI turn to social assistance, where the rules are punishing and the rates unliveable.

The instability of the Canadian job market isn't new. The reality is that, except for a brief period stretching from 1960 to 1990, contingent work and high rates of unemployment have been the norm.

The issue can be characterized as an increasing polarization between the wages and working conditions of those who have permanent full-time jobs and the growing legions of those who work in contract, temporary or part-time jobs.

The burgeoning growth of non-standard work arrangements is the result of conscious strategies invoked by private and public sector employers singing from the hymn book of the International Monetary Fund and other notable representatives of capital. At the core of the issue is a return - not just a shift - to a blatant reverence for the private market, which is seen as a more effective and therefore preferred social regulator than the state. This view of the state as inefficient and undesirable characterizes capitalism through the ages, with the partial exception of the welfare state period that was triggered by the 30 per cent unemployment rates of the Great Depression in the 1930s. The marginal gains workers made during those years are being steadily eroded.

Left without an income or eking out an existence at subsistence levels, unemployed or underemployed workers are exposed to the ongoing risk of losing their housing, their kids, their health and their sanity.

So where's the resistance across Canada?

In Ontario, important campaigns have sparked interest and garnered attention in the community and beyond. Pay the Rent AND Feed the Kids was initiated by low-income activists in Ottawa. The singular demand was an increase in social assistance rates. Broader in scope, the Ontario Needs a Raise Campaign brings together community and labour activists around the twin

demands of an increase in social assistance rates and the minimum wage. More recently, a third demand was added: an end to the clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement from parents on social assistance.

Campaign leaders conceptualize social assistance recipients and minimum wage workers as related but separate constituencies. So far - perhaps for strategic reasons - there has not been an inclination to characterize both those who require a raise in social assistance rates or the minimum wage as being workers moving between or without work.

Outside the parameters of specific campaigns, there are also groups such as Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment, the Workers Information Centre and Justice for Workers that organize low-income contingent workers. But the organizing is Toronto-specific and has attracted the attention - but not the energy and focus - of the labour movement. Low-income workers' organizations have not always actively sought out the support of organized labour. This is due to time and resource pressures as well as strategic considerations, but it is also a function of the labour movement keeping its gaze focused almost exclusively on the needs of its members, the majority of whom are not in minimum wage and/or precarious jobs.

In Canada, the reality is that community and labour organizers have preferred to focus on issue-specific campaigns - social assistance rates, the minimum wage, affordable housing - rather than on a more global approach that attacks the problem at its roots: the contest between labour and capital.

There are good and important strategic reasons for doing so. Resources are scarce

Jacquie Chic is a low-income activist and lawyer in Toronto.

and levels of impoverishment are so dire that there is a pressing need to respond to the emergencies that confront low-income people in their daily lives. Theorizing about what creates poverty may strike some as important long-term work but not a priority in the pressure cooker of responding to urgent need.

But is it necessary to choose? Unemployed workers rose up to resist the hideous conditions found in the "relief camps" established by Tory Prime Minister R.B. Bennett in the 1930s. Gruesome though they were, the camps were the only buttress against starvation at a time when unemployment insurance and social assistance for single unemployed workers was unavailable.

were on the road.

Increasingly anxious about the mounting resistance, Bennett ordered the RCMP to halt the march. On July 1, 1935 workers were arrested at a large public meeting. This sparked what was dubbed the Regina Riot.

In the wake of the uprising, it became difficult for governments not to at least appear to be responding to the needs of unemployed workers. For the first time, unemployment was spoken of in government circles as being the result of structural rather than personal failings. The unemployment insurance program was the direct result of the resistance as was the introduction of social assistance for single employable unemployed workers.

make organizing unemployed and precariously employed workers a priority.

*How can we introduce the significance of labour market conditions into campaigns focused on social assistance recipients, tenants and other more narrowly defined groups without losing the immediacy of demands centred on rates, the minimum wage, affordable housing, etc.?

*Is the time ripe for a general strike? If so, what would the demands be?

*With or without a general strike, what should unemployed workers be demanding? A more reliable, accessible and adequate unemployment insurance program and, more broadly, a fair income security system are just the tip of the



Demonstration at the Ontario Ministry of Labour to get tough on dead beat bosses, June 11, 2004

Unemployed workers forced into the camps formed the Relief Camp Workers Union. The RCWU was affiliated with the militant Communist-led Workers Unity League.

The RCWU went on strike in early 1935. The workers marched to Vancouver, the site of mass demonstrations. In an effort to bring their demands for more jobs and higher wages directly to the federal government, the RCWU workers marched to Ottawa. Over 1,000 strikers left Vancouver on June 3, 1935. Unemployed workers joined the trek along the entire route. By the time the march reached Regina on June 14, about 2,000 workers

There is an important lesson embedded in the story of the RCWU. Capital and its public and private representatives felt they had no choice but to respond because the resistance squarely took on the contest between capital and labour.

Highlighting unemployment in our organizing efforts allows us to expose the frailties of capitalism. I offer some questions that I hope will spark discussion:

*How can we persuade the labour movement to organize among precariously employed workers? There is wide recognition of the impact the minimum wage has on bargaining unit salaries, but for the most part, there is an unwillingness to

iceberg. Job creation and full employment are likely on the list, but what are the specifics of those demands? What else do we need to be talking about?

Social assistance recipients, people receiving workers' compensation, Canada Pension and employment insurance benefits share a common identity as unemployed workers. Focusing on the commonality has the potential to unify and expand a low-income people's movement. If our organizing efforts fail to focus on the core issue of the relationship between capital and labour, perhaps we inadvertently participate in the sham that capital so skillfully perpetrates. ★

A FIVE STAR SWEATSHOP

I refuse to be silent

In Issue #46 of *New Socialist* (April/May 2004), we printed the text of a speech delivered by Metropolitan Hotel Workers' Committee member **Emily Tang** at an International Women's Day forum organized by the Toronto New Socialist Group. The Toronto New Socialists recently invited Emily to provide an opening speech at a public forum in late September which featured a screening of Ken Loach's film *Bread and Roses*, an account of the struggle of immigrant workers who organized under the *Justice for Janitors* campaign in the US.

On Saturday October 9th, Emily reported for work at the Metropolitan Hotel and was summoned to a meeting with the Hotel's General Manager and head of Human Resources, where she was confronted about having delivered a speech at this public forum.

Emily made clear to hotel management that she would not comment on activities she engaged in on her own time away from her job. She was then informed that the price for publicly criticizing her employer was immediate suspension. We can only expect that a previous written threat to fire Emily for speaking out may now be put into effect. The Metropolitan Hotel Workers' Committee (MHWC) and its allies, however, refuse to be silenced or intimidated by this despicable attack. Within an hour of Emily's suspension, supporters joined her outside the Hotel for a spirited and effective picket. This was a prelude to a full-blown campaign to defend Emily and a step up in the fight for justice for all workers at the Metropolitan.

Below we print the text of the speech that **EMILY TANG** delivered at the Toronto NSG public forum on Sept. 23.

I work at the Metropolitan Hotel and am part of the rank and file Hotel Workers Committee that has been formed there.

We are here to watch a film (Ken Loach's *Bread and Roses*) that deals with a struggle by immigrant workers for justice. Because of that, I want to make a statement about the struggle of immigrant hotel workers here in Toronto and some very important issues that are connected to it.

Emily Tang is a worker at the Metropolitan Hotel in Toronto and a member of UNITE HERE Local 75.

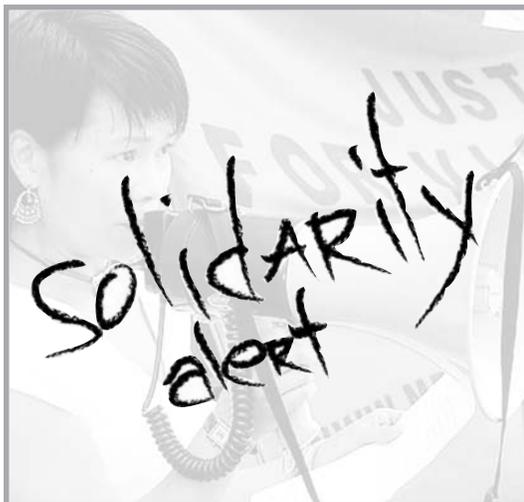
The management of the Metropolitan has chosen to try and silence me as a member of the committee. I have been called into a meeting and handed a letter that makes clear that any public criticisms of the hotel will mean my immediate firing. I have discussed this with other members of the committee and supporters, and I have decided that I cannot accept such a gag order. If I were to put up with this treatment, no hotel worker at the Metropolitan could ever speak in public or be openly connected to the Committee without the risk of losing his or her job.

I repeat again here today that the Metropolitan Hotel is a five star sweatshop. It abuses its workers and I won't be silent as long as this goes on. I demand justice for Shahid, a Muslim worker who was hounded from his job by hotel security while his union didn't lift a finger to help him. I demand justice for the housekeeping workers who have had their bodies burned by the cleaning chemicals they are forced to work with. I demand justice for all the injured workers who are denied proper treatment and I stand up for all the workers who have not been given the breaks the law



EMILY TANG SPEAKS TO RALLY (PHOTO: JOHN BONNAR - [HTTP://OHNB.SMUGMUG.COM](http://ohnb.smugmug.com))

**Reinstate Emily Tang with full pay!
Justice for workers at the Metropolitan Hotel!**



To find out how you can support the Metropolitan Hotel workers in their rank and file union struggle, contact them at:

justice@metropolitanhotelsworkers.org,

or check out their website at:

www.metropolitanhotelsworkers.org

is supposed to provide them with.

Both the union leaders and the management say that we are making up lies. Is it a lie that Pedro Vanegas was disciplined for speaking Spanish in the kitchen to a co-worker? Is it a lie that a supervisor stood over stewarding workers while they took breaks which they were entitled to, and stood at the door of the washroom when they went in there? Is it a lie that, when they went to their union representative, Cornetta Mason, about this, she told them management could stand wherever they wanted and she would not help him?

The management of the hotel is out to silence those who are resisting the abuses that the leadership of the union has no intention of challenging. Our so-called union representative, Cornetta Mason, is now going around the hotel demanding of workers that they tell her who is involved with OCAP. I refuse to be silent about any of this.

I have a right to free speech and I have a right to demand that my union defend that

right, even if I am saying things that the union leadership may not welcome. I think I also have a right to demand of people in other unions and in the community that they stand with me if I am victimized. This speech will be posted on the website of the Hotel Workers Committee. I invite anyone who wants to print it in their own magazines to do so. I am speaking as publicly as I can, without fear, because I am doing what is right.

The Metropolitan Hotel Workers Committee is taking a stand against the exploitation and abuse of immigrant workers. In trying to silence me, they are trying to intimidate and defeat our committee and ensure that immigrant workers have no voice and no rights. When they read this speech, they may act against me. If they do, our response will be to double and treble the size of our campaign for justice at the Metropolitan.

We will be asking for your help in the weeks and months ahead, and I hope that you will stand with us. ★

WOMEN EDUCATE • RESIST

The NSG is sending at least one of our women members to a week-long socialist feminist school at the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) in Amsterdam. This will be an opportunity to develop politics, share experiences and make international links.

But all this costs money. We need to raise over \$2000 to cover air fare, tuition and expenses. So we are asking you, our readers, to help out with financial donations. No contribution is too small!

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Please make cheques or money orders payable to New Socialist and indicate that it's for the Women's School initiative, and mail to:

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Members of the Metropolitan Hotel Workers Committee rally outside the hotel.

PHOTO: JOHN BONNAR

Palestinian activists fight back

BY HAZEM JAMJOUR

We demand that the Right of Return be fulfilled. Until then, Palestinian refugees in the diaspora and internally displaced Palestinians need to be granted full economic, political and social rights

From the Beirut Declaration, 19 September 2004

Since declaring its bloody “war on terror”, not only has the United States changed its immigration policies and procedures, but so too has Canada. Canada’s new *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (2002) escalated the war on immigrants and refugees in this country. The main victims of this war have been poor people, specifically those from Arab and Muslim countries.

The two main weapons used by the Canadian state are incarceration and deportation. The new laws allow border officials to throw anyone in jail who they “suspect” will not show up to their refugee hearing. This means that these officials have full discretion in making the decision about who to imprison.

Even if you are not in jail, the refugee determination process is full of systemic obstacles that make it difficult for refugees to protect themselves against deportation. The Immigration and Refugee Board Members responsible for adjudicating refugee claims are politically appointed by the ruling party in parliament, which means that they are not necessarily experts in this field of law. This is repeatedly demonstrated in shameful decisions rejecting refugee claims. Were they not used in the context of justifying a human rights violation, these decisions would have been laughable in light of their confused and often ridiculous content. It used to be that two board members presided over a refugee claim. The new law removes one of them, and in return was supposed to offer an appeals process. But this was never instituted, so now a refugee claimant’s life is in the hands of one political appointee.

After losing a refugee claim, options become very limited. The claimant can apply to have their deportation stopped on the grounds that they face a high risk of being harmed if deported. This application is called a Pre-Removal Risk Assessment, and only a tiny minority of them are successful (around 3-4%). A further option is the Humanitarian and Compassionate

Every successful
Palestinian refugee
claim or risk
assessment is,
in a sense, an
indictment of Israel’s
abuse of Palestinian
human rights.

application, which is an appeal to the Immigration Minister to grant status on the basis that the person would face unusual, excessive or undeserved hardship if forced to apply for status from elsewhere.

One of the first organized struggles against this immigration system came after Canada hosted the 2002 G8 summit and committed to the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). As part of its agreements with Algeria, the Canadian state agreed to lift a moratorium that had stopped deportations to Algeria. Overnight, over a thousand Algerians were slated for deportation. Algerian refugees,

particularly in Montreal, set up the Committee of Non-Status Algerians and set out to pressure the government to stop deporting members of their community. It was a long and hard fight that peaked with the occupation of then Immigration Minister Denis Coderre’s office on 30 May 2003, following his refusal to meet with the refugees. The occupation was brutally suppressed; many of the men were beaten up and tasered on their necks, backs, torsos and genitals. One man was bashed on the head with the butt of a taser gun, leaving a large gash on his forehead. Another man lost a tooth as a result of being punched in the face by a police officer. This brutality was followed by several deportations that reached their climax with the deportation order for one of the committee’s leading organizers, Mohammed Cherfi, who took sanctuary in a Catholic church in Quebec City on 18 February 2004. Police raided the church on the grounds of a criminal charge they had laid against him, arrested him, dropped the criminal charge, and deported him to the United States.

While the Algerian committee’s political campaign was quite successful, as the government created a special procedure for Algerians living in Quebec to remain in Canada, Algerians in the rest of the country remained under the risk of deportation. The Algerians’ struggle empowered many other communities to take action, especially the Palestinian refugees in Montreal.

Palestinian refugees are specifically targeted by the Canadian refugee determination process. Every successful Palestinian refugee claim or risk assessment is, in a sense, an indictment of Israel’s abuse of Palestinian human rights. As such, the politics of Canada’s benevolence towards Israel enters the courtroom, and the fact that the Board Members are political appointees plays a major role. People working on the legal front in the battle to stop the deportation of Palestinian refugees have also noted that Palestinian cases tend to be sent

Hazem Jamjoum is a member of the Toronto section of the Coalition Against the Deportation of Palestinian Refugees, as well as Al-Awda – The Palestine Right of Return Coalition and Sumoud: A Political Prisoners Working Group.



PHOTO: DARREN ELL

Protesters demonstrate against Canada's racist refugee laws.

to particular Board Members who develop reputations for denying Palestinians refugee status.

Out of this context emerged the Coalition against the Deportation of Palestinian Refugees in February 2003. It has steadily grown since starting off with a very small group of refugees who wanted to take their struggle for status beyond the courtroom and into the political arena, with political activists joining them in their organizing. Its demands are that the Canadian government must:

1. Immediately stop the deportations of Palestinian refugee claimants; and
2. Grant them permanent residency on Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds.

The Coalition has received over 140 endorsements for their demands from various groups in Canada and other countries.

There are two sides to the Coalition's organizing. The first is the legal battle to ensure that the refugees' applications to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) are properly filed, particularly the Humanitarian and Compassionate applications which are the basis of the second demand. The second is the political campaign which has taken many forms. Members of the Coalition and their allies

hold a spirited weekly picket in front of the IRB offices in Montreal. They have also created networks with various groups, particularly immigrant and refugee rights activist groups. They are part of a larger coalition of self-organized migrants called Solidarity Across Borders, which includes the Action Committee of Non-Status Algerians, the Pakistani Action Committee Against Racial Profiling, Colombianos Unidos, the Support Committee for Basque Political Prisoners, the Kurdish Institute of Montreal and the South Asian Women's Community Center.

The Coalition has also organized larger demonstrations to push for their demands, the latest of which was on September 18 and drew over 1,000 demonstrators.

Raising awareness is another aspect of the political campaign. This work educates people on the racism of the Canadian refugee determination system, the plight of Palestinian refugees, and particularly the misery and brutality of life in the refugee camps in Palestine and Lebanon to which they may be deported. Politicians and members of parliament were sent an information package entitled *Stateless and Deported*, which was prepared by members of the Coalition, and some Parliamentarians raised the issue of deporting Palestinians in Parliament itself.

The Coalition now operates in other Canadian cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, to the point where there is a national campaign around the demands. This was a very important step in light of the Algerian committee's experience in which Algerians outside Quebec were not protected by the Montreal-centered campaign. Much of the work in these other cities, alongside the arduous legal work, revolves around trying to get Palestinian communities that live there to help in applying pressure on the government to accept the campaign's demands. The need for political mobilization is becoming increasingly important as the deportation dates for many of these refugees are just around the corner.

Deportation is a violation of a person's human rights, but is largely not recognized as such by international law. The dominant view of state sovereignty is still one that allows states to discriminate with regards to who is legally allowed to be within the state's territory, even if that means sending someone to face such brutality as Israeli state terrorism. The victims of such a system are almost always the most defenseless: poor people and people against whom there is much racism. These "illegal" human beings have very few options when the apparatus of the state aims to deport them, either they submit or they hide in fear. A stark example is that of Nabih, Khalil and Therese Ayoub (ages 69, 67 and 62 respectively) who have taken sanctuary in Montreal's Notre-Dame-de-Grâce church since January of this year so as not to be deported back to Ein El Helweh refugee camp in Lebanon. But as we have seen from the story of Mohammed Cherfi, even the age old tradition of church sanctuary can be violated by the state. The importance of initiatives like the Coalition becomes all the more clear upon understanding that the injustices of such a system can be eliminated only when people band together and fight back. ★

The Coalition Against the Deportation of Palestinian Refugees
 C/O QPIRG McGill
 3647 University Street, 3rd Floor
 Montreal (Quebec) H3A 2B3
 Web: <http://refugees.resist.ca>
 E-mail: refugees@riseup.net
 Telephone: (514)591.3171
 Fax: (514)398-8976

Ballistic missile defence and space warfare

BY MATTHEW BEHRENS

As Americans went to the polls in November, the ability to “protect America” from unknown threats dominated campaign rhetoric. Among George W. Bush’s long-planned October “shows of strength” was the deployment of a bare bones ballistic missile defence (BMD) system to protect the US against “rogue states” and accidental missile launches.

While the Canadian government insisted the BMD system would not lead to the weaponization of space, even a cursory glance at a host of Pentagon documents shows that Ottawa is either lying or hopelessly naive.

The concept of BMD is simple. The US hopes to spot, track and destroy any missile fired in its direction either by a nuclear-armed state or an international “rogue” player.

A series of ground-based interceptors, or kill vehicles, would be launched at a speed of 36,000 km/h to hit the incoming missile, flying at a rate of 20,000 km/h.

On the surface, it may sound like a reasonable idea in a world where tens of thousands of nuclear weapons remain on high alert, pointed at cities large and small.

Yet, even the strongest supporters of Missile Defence have expressed reservations about a system that scientists have called a “rush to failure,” asking whether a speeding bullet can be hit and destroyed by another speeding bullet. The head of the Strategic Defence Initiative (the precursor to Missile Defence), General James Abrahamson, stated in 1984, “Nowhere have we stated that the goal of the SDI is to come up with a ‘leakproof’ defence.”

A May 2004 report, *Technical Realities*, by the US-based Union of Concerned

“Having missiles intercepted overhead is something Canadians will simply have to live with. It’s Canadians who will have to deal with the debris from destroyed enemy rockets raining down on them. Canada might want to request extra funding for hardhats, but there’s not much else that can be done about it.”

Centre for Strategic and
International Studies,
Washington, D.C., 2003

Scientists, found “no basis for believing the system will have any capability to defend against a real attack.”

During 2003, four separate studies by the US General Accounting Office (like Canada’s Auditor General) found that none of the 10 essential technologies to make Missile Defence work had been tested under real conditions and that 80 per cent of the technology was not even at the development stage.

BMD tests have been rigged, providing decoys which are impossible to miss, placing Global Positioning System (GPS) beacons on the target missile, and artificially increasing the heat source on a target so the infrared sensors on the kill vehicle cannot fail to identify their target.

If it won’t work, why is it being pursued?

Because it is literally impossible to hit an incoming missile with a kill vehicle, military planners hope to advertise the benefits of space-based kill vehicles which will blast

enemy missiles before they exit their launch phase halfway around the globe. While this will be couched in defensive terms, such dreaming tends to downplay the largely offensive role space-based platforms would play.

The ultimate goal of the current BMD regime is to act as a kind of Trojan Horse, enabling the development of a space warfare fighting capacity.

Signs of this outcome are literally everywhere. General Joseph Ashy, who during the Clinton years was Commander-in-Chief of US Space Command, declared: “Some people don’t want to hear this, and it sure isn’t in vogue, but absolutely – we’re going to fight in space. We’re going to fight from space, and we’re going to fight into space...That’s why the U.S. has development programs in directed energy and hit-to-kill mechanisms.”

Vision 2020, the key document of US Space Command, states: “Many of the systems and concepts for Missile Defence may have applicability to Force Application. This concept envisions holding a finite number of targets at risk anywhere, anytime with nearly instantaneous attack from space-based assets.”

Vision 2020 also states, “Ground-Based Interceptors, Space Operations Vehicles, Space-Based Platforms and Lasers, and High Power Microwaves are crucial. The Space-Based Laser and High Power Microwave will use directed energy to strike nearly all potential targets.”

The Bush administration’s 2005 budget plans, meanwhile, call for \$10.2 billion for missile defence and “a space-based interceptor test bed ... and development and testing of light weight space-based interceptor components... beginning in 2005.”

The US has for over a decade operated a Colorado-based “Space Warfare Center” designed to “develop and test concepts,

Matthew Behrens is a founding member of Homes not Bombs, a nonviolent direct action network. He was one of a group arrested at DREO, Canada’s home of space warfare research and development, in 2001 after trying to conduct a citizen’s weapons inspection.

applications, and procedures that enable the Warfighter to more fully utilize the unique capabilities of space-based assets. The Space Warfare Center is tasked with 'operationalizing' space, making its use timely and routine to the Warfighter."

Vision 2020 also states that, "By 2020, a second generation system for National Missile Defence is expected to be in place with many of the weapons and sensors potentially moving into space. Surveillance and strike missions for land, sea, and air will improve using space systems. For example, a force application system based in space could be available for strategic attack, and space-based surveillance may augment systems on land and in the air."

Space is already considered a crucial part of the Pentagon's arsenal. During the invasion of Afghanistan, the Pentagon entered an agreement with the American firm Space Imaging to buy up all images of Afghanistan from that company's Ikonos satellite to prevent journalists from obtaining pictures of US bombing.

At least 50 military satellites supported the US invasion of Iraq, with reconnaissance data, communications links, targeting data for cruise missiles and smart bombs, weather forecasting and more.

CANADA'S ROLE

While Canada has not formally signed on, and a March 2004 poll showed 69 per cent of Canadians do not want to be part of Missile Defence, the actions, policies and contracts of Canadian government, research and corporate entities show that Canadian involvement is active and growing:

- The 1994 Canadian Defence White Paper allowed for Missile Defence research and development.
- In October, 1997, the US and Canadian militaries signed a joint Statement of Intent for military space cooperation.
- Canada's Technology Investment Strategy 2000 declares: "Space soon will be the fourth medium of warfare, it will not only bind all war fighting forces together but will also become strategically critical to the survival of warfighters...For future coalition warfare, space superiority will be fundamental."
- The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) website states: "Canada and the US also established a [missile defence] bilateral information sharing working group that has met twice a year since 2000. In addition, Canada

placed a Canadian Forces Liaison officer with the US Missile Defence Agency in early 2001 for the purpose of supporting the ongoing consultation and information gathering process."

• Early in 2004, Canadian War Minister David Pratt wrote US War Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that "[we want to] ensure the closest possible involvement and



insight for Canada, both government and industry, in the US missile defence program." Rumsfeld replied: "I am supportive of the approach to missile defence cooperation that you outlined in your letter."

• The February 23, 2004, *Globe and Mail* reported "Canada is talking to Washington about the use of Canadian soil for stationing interceptor rocket launchers and radar stations as part of a continental ballistic missile defence program."

• In February, 2004, the Canadian War Department issued tentative contracts worth \$700,000 to test Canadian radar technology during Missile Defence tests slated for the summer, 2004.

• Canadian military researchers have been involved in a series of Missile Defence-related projects, including:

- (a) the Quantum Well Infrared Photo-detector, a "key contributor to the collaborative work with the (US) Ballistic Missile Defence Organization";
- (b) Defence Research and Development Canada exploration of the science behind placing light-weight weapons platforms in space, asking, "Will technology allow us to fit 70 tons of lethality [killing power] and survivability into a 20 ton package?";
- (c) use of Canada's RADARSAT-2 satellite to produce "a ground moving target indication (GMTI) capability" will "provide an

improved operational picture to the war fighter...there is a high level of US interest in the Space-Based Radar GMTI Project"; (d) The Canadian Defence Industrial Research program has developed products useful for the Missile Defence interceptor, the exo-atmosphere kill vehicle; (e) Defence Research and Development Ottawa is working on expanding the uses

While Canada has not formally signed on to be part of Missile Defence, Canadian involvement is active and growing.

of X-bandwidths, which will be used as part of the radar detection system of missile defence.

• The Canadian Defence Industries Association produced a paper called, "The National Missile Defense Program: An Assessment of Market Opportunities for Canadian Industry," which predicted upwards of \$1 billion in military exports from the program.

• Canadian corporations which either have contracts for missile defence-related programs or have contributed to the formation of the weaponization of space include CAE, Panorama Business Views, COMDEV and Bristol Aerospace.

Such work is proceeding despite a caution from the Canadian War Department which, in a classified document obtained by the *Ottawa Citizen* in January, 2004, declared "A significant risk associated with BMD [missile defence] from the non-proliferation and disarmament perspective is its reinforcement of trends towards the weaponization of outer space."

War Minister Bill Graham's plea that signing on is necessary because we live next to the US is a clear signal that Ottawa will continue to go along with the US foreign policy lead, even if it does so in the traditional Canadian way of saying one thing and doing another. ★

More than a personality, less than a revolution

BY JEFF WEBBER

We might think of denunciation in the pages of the *New York Times* as an almost necessary if insufficient indication that a major social movement or process of social change demands the support and solidarity of the international Left. Vilification in the world's most important newspaper often lays the necessary ideological foundations for subsequent subversion of whatever regime or social movement is being vilified. There are no ironclad rules in politics, but if this one provides any guide, Venezuelan *chavismo* requires our attention and critical engagement.

In the presidential recall referendum of August 15, 5,800,629 Venezuelans voted to retain Hugo Chávez, while 3,989,008 wanted him out. A 19% margin of victory is a resounding one for Chávez and his "Bolivarian Revolution," first brought to power democratically in 1998. Yet in his initial on-line report, Juan Forero, the *New York Times'* Latin American correspondent, saw the results as somewhat more ambiguous. He editorialized, "But the voting, if anything, showed clearly that millions of Venezuelans – not just the very rich, as Mr. Chávez contends – want him out." The rest of the silly world believed, however, that the referendum demonstrated the depth of *chavismo's* appeal among the poor majority, especially the urban underclass of Caracas's shantytowns.

This victory was attained in the face of a private media dominated by *anti-chavista* opposition supporters. It also represented yet another shutdown of the opposition's determined efforts, both legal and (more often) otherwise, to squash the Bolivarian experiment: first, a short-lived coup in April 2002, supported by the US, followed secondly by the state oil company's

(PVDS) executive lock-out of workers (erroneously referred to as a "strike" by some) from December 2002 until February 2003 (supported by the collaborationist Venezuela Workers Confederation – CTV), and, most recently, the constitutional attempt to remove Chávez through the referendum recall.

Of course, when the opposition lost the referendum, they simply cried "fraud," and denounced the results. After all, among those proclaiming the fraud-free and completely legitimate referendum results were former American president Jimmy Carter's "Carter Center," and the Organization of American States (OAS), both well-known hotbeds of radicalism.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

On April 13, 2002, the day after the coup, a *New York Times* editorial celebrated the outcome: "With yesterday's resignation [sic] of President Hugo Chávez, Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator. Mr. Chávez, a ruinous demagogue, stepped down after the military intervened and handed power to a respected business leader, Pedro Carmona." The editorial then correctly pointed out exactly why the Empire should care: "Washington has a strong stake in Venezuela's recovery. Caracas now provides 15 per cent of American oil imports, and with sounder policies could provide more." Thanks to *chavista* elements within the Venezuelan military, and, more importantly, mass mobilization by the urban poor, Carmona's regime lasted but two days followed by the reinstatement of Chávez.

As we did after the coup's defeat, the referendum result this summer ought to be celebrated by anti-imperialists across the globe, even while we avoid exaggerating its implications for "revolution" within

Venezuela. The Venezuelan Right and the Bush Administration in the White House together misread the capacity of the Bolivarian base and the popularity of *el presidente* himself.

In many ways the foreign policy of Chávez's regime is its strongest component. Prior to Chávez, Venezuela had been something of a rogue, for example, within OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), overrunning its production quotas under pressure from the United States with the effect of reducing oil prices. Since Chávez took office Venezuela has played a leading role in OPEC helping to drive up the price of oil. Revenue from crude has been critical to rejuvenating social programs and creating new ones.

Regionally, Venezuela has been at the forefront of criticizing the foreseeable implications of the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, and instead reaches back to the integrated Latin American vision of independence hero Simon Bolívar. Chávez envisions a Latin America with its own common market and trading alliances, a united front against the behemoth to the North, and an independent force within the world economy. Actual movement toward this end is limited, however, not least because the "centre-Left" regimes of Kirchner (Argentina), Lula (Brazil), and Mesa (Bolivia) have acted more as obstacles than allies in a number of ways.

Chávez has also had close relations with Cuba, selling petroleum to the Caribbean island at a reduced rate. In exchange, Cuba has been instrumental in several of the social efforts of the Chávez regime, adding a Communist bogeyman to the discourse of the Venezuelan and American Right. This month the US State Department expressed its worry over a large Cuban presence in Venezuela and the deleterious consequences this may have on the democratic system in that country. Employing some of Fidel's usual virulent tools of

Jeff Webber is a PhD Candidate in political science at the University of Toronto and a member of the Toronto branch of the NSG.

subversion, *Associated Press* (October 9, 2004) reports, "Cuba has dispatched thousands of health care workers, teachers and sports trainers to poor neighbourhoods in the country."

Finally, and most importantly, Chávez has defended the sovereignty of the Third World and condemned imperial invasions by the United States. Most recently, as Justin Podur reported from a press conference in Caracas the day after the referendum, "Unlike virtually every other world leader, [Chávez] spoke openly against the US war in Iraq by actually mentioning the Iraqi victims who have been massacred by the thousands."

At the same time, we shouldn't exaggerate the anti-imperialist nature of Chávez. Clear limitations become evident when, following James Petras, we recognize "the divergence of tactics between an ideological Washington and a pragmatic Wall Street." While the Republicans, Democrats, Congress, and the President have all supported the by-any-means approach to removing the Venezuelan version of tyranny and evil, "major US and European oil companies and banks have been engaged in stable, sustained, and profitable economic relations with the Chávez government.... Major US multi-national oil companies project between \$5 billion and \$20 billion in new investments in exploration and exploitation."

HISTORY, CLASS POLARIZATION AND POLITICAL VACUUM

Typically, mainstream-media and academic accounts of the current situation feature Chávez as the puppet master behind the country's pains, and the primary explanatory factor behind Venezuela since its history ended in 1998. The truth is more complicated. Social forces and class warfare run far deeper than the man himself.

For most of Venezuela's history since 1958 presidential power has oscillated between the social democratic *Acción Democrática* (AD) and the social Christian *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (COPEI). The so-called "pacted democracy," a system known as *Punto Fijo*, entailed the exclusion of the Communists, the convergence between the two parties ideologically and programmatically, and the cooptation of labour through party control of the CTV and the selective doling out of state patronage.



Venezuelans celebrate Chavez referendum victory.

Economically, the state intervened substantially in the economy and protected national industry. Meanwhile, because Venezuela was a leading exporter of oil for much of the period since 1925, economic growth rates were quite steady, unlike in much of the rest of Latin America. So, while poverty persisted under the "pact," there was sufficient oil-capital to lubricate social programs and quell serious politicization of class conflict.

This was the case until 1986, when oil prices plummeted and the entire economic edifice on which the elected oligarchy was constructed began to come apart. Signs of serious social polarization articulated in politicized class conflict would be a few years in coming, however. Carlos Andrés Pérez (1989-1993) was elected president on a populist platform, specifically against neoliberal structural adjustment policies. However, after he was elected he instituted a slew of orthodox neoliberal stabilization measures that resulted in the furious eruption of the urban slums of Caracas in what came to be known as the *Caracazo*. The riots were violently repressed by the military, with medical personnel estimating 1,000 to 1,500 dead, the official number being much lower at 287. With a few punctuated breaks of heterodoxy, neoliberal economic policies were pursued with force under subsequent administrations.

The cracks in the economic system were plain to see. Since the mid-1980s dramatic

changes in the class structure of Venezuelan society were evident. There was a huge exodus from industrial and agricultural jobs into the service sector, and a move from formal modes of employment to precarious employment in the urban informal sector. Demographically, the changes in the class structure precipitated a wave of rural-to-urban migration with some analysts estimating that 600,000 people left the countryside for the urban slums from 1989-1992. Meanwhile, poverty increased and inequality reached unprecedented heights.

This socioeconomic backdrop explains the corresponding decay in the *Punto Fijo* system and the delegitimization of the two mainstream parties, and to a lesser but real extent "political parties" in general. It was out of this social milieu that Chávez emerged, winning the support of the poor with his anti-establishment, anti-corruption, and anti-neoliberal political message. Of course it was his lack of political-party affiliation, and image of "outsider" (Chávez is of indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan heritage), that facilitated his rise to power. At the same time, it is his lack of an institutional party base, and coherent ideology that contributes to the wavering of the Chávez regime in power, and limits the hope of radicalizing the process of social change.

See *CHAVEZ'S RECORD: Page 34*

Getting beyond hypocrisy on humanitarian intervention

SUDAN

BY JUSTIN PODUR

Paul Martin gave a moving speech at the United Nations on September 22, 2004. “Tens of thousands have been murdered, raped and assaulted,” he said. “War crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed.”

A courageous act, to say such things about US foreign policy in Iraq. Even though reports of rape in prisons like Abu Ghraib are widespread, the word rape is never used in the mainstream US media. Neither is the word torture, though Martin didn't mention torture in his speech. The US invasion of Iraq, as straightforward international aggression (not a pre-emptive or even preventive strike) definitely counts as a crime against humanity, although again, to say such things in public, especially on US soil at the United Nations, would have major implications for a country's foreign policy and a politician's career. To be sure, sniper attacks, aerial bombardments, and the use of helicopters and other aircraft against civilians are war crimes, and tens of thousands have been murdered in this way in Iraq, but again, in the current political climate, no Western politician could be expected to say so.

It would therefore have been quite impressive if Paul Martin had actually been talking about the US in Iraq. But he was not.

Nor was he talking about Palestinian refugees when he said: “They are hungry, they are homeless, they are sick and many have been driven out of their own country.” This would have particularly true for Palestinian refugees in Gaza, for example, where the UN special rapporteur for food said last year Israel is deliberately

starving the population through its policy of closures, resulting in over a fifth of children being malnourished. Israeli policy hasn't changed. Instead, attacks on civilian infrastructure in the Occupied Territories have continued, as have the sieges and closures. Malnutrition causes brain damage so that even when a child has been restored to a proper diet he or she may continue to suffer developmental problems.

Talk about Palestine or Iraq would not have earned Paul Martin kudos from US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who praised him as a “good friend and neighbour” and declared him such a leader in the field.

What field? Not the killing fields of Haiti, where corpses of Lavalas activists and Aristide supporters have been piling up in morgues and graves, some three thousand, and ongoing, since good friends and neighbours and leaders in the field, Canada and the United States, sent their troops to guarantee the February 2004 coup against Haiti's democratically elected and massively supported President.

No, Paul Martin was not talking about Iraq or Palestine or Haiti. He was talking about Sudan.

GENUINE CONCERN?

Martin's concern about mass murder, starvation, and ethnic cleansing in Sudan, like Powell's, might seem inconsistent, given their eager championing of such deeds elsewhere. The same could be said of US politicians like Republican Senator Bill Frist and Iraq invaders like Tony Blair. These notables are either lying about their indignation about what is happening in Sudan, or they are racists, who just can't summon indignation for dead Third-Worlders when the killers are from the First World or acting on its behalf.

In fact the consistency is of a different kind. For it is the selective indignation of

the likes of Martin, Blair, Powell and their ilk to the atrocities unfolding in what they term “rogue states” or “failed states” that leads to the atrocities unfolding under Western occupations.



Justin Podur is a writer and activist based in Toronto. His blog is www.killingtrain.com

In Haiti, for example, the formula was clear: first, help a state to fail by denying it aid, applying vicious sanctions, insisting on neoliberal policies, and arming paramilitary killers to invade and slaughter their way to the capital. Then call it a failed state, oust its leaders, and occupy the place. Whatever atrocities occur in response to Western occupation can then be used as proof of the need for more occupation and intervention.

In Iraq, a genuinely tyrannical and dictatorial state was made to fail by a process of bombing, bleeding by sanctions, and murderous invasion and occupation. Now, as Blair and Bush's troops slaughter Iraqis at will, interventionists argue that the West needs to stay the course lest Iraq, the failed state, descend into civil war. Israel's ongoing massacre, ethnic cleansing and deliberate starvation program is justified by the interventionists as necessary because Palestinians can't find leaders that will recognize Israel's security needs.

The Sudan crisis has provided the interventionists with an opportunity to simply change the subject: if you care so much about the Palestinians, they can ask, why don't you care about Sudan? If you care so much about Iraqis, then why don't you support intervention to save people in Sudan? The next step, of course, is to accuse those who talk about Western murders and crimes as anti-semites, anti-Americans, or racists. To this, anti-occupation people can reply by calling the liberal interventionists hypocrites, citing liberal indifference or contribution to crimes in the above cases as evidence.

Mutual cries of hypocrisy, however, even when true, won't help those who are actually being murdered, raped and assaulted, who are actually hungry, homeless, sick and have been driven out of their own country. In the specific case of Sudan and Darfur, for example, the hypocrisy of gangsters like Martin, Powell, and Blair does not make atrocities in the region any less real, or the crisis any less urgent.

Lansana Gberie, an Africa expert who

has studied numerous interventions and conflict situations in the continent, cites liberal interventionists in his recent paper arguing for intervention in Sudan, "The Darfur Crisis: A Test Case for Humanitarian Intervention" (online at www.kaiptc.org). But he also cites very important and credible human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the UN, whose estimates of deaths are in the tens of thousands and displaced people in the hundreds

The Sudan crisis has provided interventionists with an opportunity to simply change the subject: if you care so much about the Palestinians, they can ask, why don't you care about Sudan?

of thousands. These organizations have sometimes been wrong (Amnesty International, for example, picked up the phony story about Iraqis murdering Kuwaiti babies in incubators, helping the propaganda machine of the US devastation of Iraq in 1991) or disproportionate (some of Human Rights Watch's material on Venezuela, for example, has condemned the Chavez government in disproportion-

ately harsh terms, helping the US campaign against that government). Their record overall, however, is quite good, and the evidence they presented in the cases where they have turned out to be wrong was rather thin and later discredited. The evidence they have presented on Darfur, however, is solidly documented. Not to prove genocide, but certainly to prove massive suffering.

The story is also quite plausible (unlike stories of Saddam Hussein's al-Qaeda links or imminent nuclear threat). For example, as US-backed paramilitaries in Colombia know, civilian massacres to drive whole populations into refugee camps can be a highly effective counterinsurgency strategy, cutting insurgents off from their support and supply base and terrifying the population away from them.

Gberie also cites Sudan expert Alex de Waal's excellent July 2004 article from the *London Review of Books* for background on Darfur. That background is too extensive to summarize in a short article. Those concerned about Darfur should read it, and carefully. But suffice it to say that similar dynamics exist in Darfur's crisis as exist in so many other conflicts that plague the Third World today: a legacy of colonial destruction; a postcolonial state that acts like the colonial state did; an elite that uses the state as its own private estate to dole out privileges and power; mobilization along ethnic lines using racist ideologies; interference from outside powers; political exclusion leading to armed insurgencies, and a state that responds to armed insurgencies with vicious counterinsurgency.

De Waal's recommendations might strike both anti-imperialists and liberal interventionists as unsatisfactory. (See sidebar on page 18 for the recommendations)

DE WAAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

A huge aid effort is grinding into gear. But the distances involved mean that food relief is expensive and unlikely to be sufficient. It's tempting to send in the British army to deliver food, but this would be merely symbolic: relief can be flown in more cheaply by civil contractors, and distributed more effectively by relief agencies. The areas controlled by the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and Justice and Equality Movement (SEM) contain hundreds of thousands of civilians who are not getting any help. As soon as an intrepid cameraman returns with pictures of this hidden famine, there will be an outcry, and pressure for aid to be delivered across the front lines. There's no reason to wait for the pictures before acting, although it's clear that cross-line aid convoys will need to carry armed guards.

The biggest help would be peace. In theory, there's a ceasefire; in practice, the government and Janjawiid are ignoring it, and the rebels are responding in kind. The government denies that it set up, armed and directed the Janjawiid. It did, but the monster that Khartoum helped create may not always do its bidding: distrust of the capital runs deep among Darfurians, and the Janjawiid leadership knows it cannot be disarmed by force. When President Bashir promised Kofi Annan and Colin Powell that he would disarm the militia, he was making a promise he couldn't keep. The best, and perhaps the only, means of disarmament is that employed by the British seventy-five years ago: establish a working local administration, regulate the ownership of arms, and gradually isolate the outlaws and brigands who refuse to conform. It took a decade then, and it won't be any faster today. Not only are there more weapons now, but the political polarities are much sharper.

If de Waal's recommendation of methods used by British colonialists seems unsavory, Gberie's advocacy of an African solution might seem better: "By the end of August 2004, the AU [African Union - NS] had 305 soldiers on the ground in Darfur as part of a ceasefire monitoring mechanism, and the UN was working with the AU on a plan that would raise this force level to 3000 AU troops and 1200 police officers. However, the Sudanese government has rejected AU offers to increase the size of the force and extend its mandate to include the protection of civilians, insisting on an AU role that is limited to observation and monitoring."

Clearly Ramesh Thakur, Vice Rector of the UN University, who Gberie cites, is correct when he argues that Western medicine is no cure for Darfur's ills, and that a Western intervention, far from offering a solution, may add to the problems. Thakur has good reasons for thinking so. The US's actions in Afghanistan, where funds were available for bombing but not for rebuilding, show that the US is more interested in building bases, controlling regions, and controlling energy sources than solving local humanitarian crises. The oil connection in Darfur also casts doubt on US humanitarian intentions. Sudan is a country with a Muslim population and, even though the Islamite regime is oppressive and unpopular, an invasion would do little for pro-US sentiment in a region where such sentiment is sorely lacking. US military doctrine, which compensates for its reluctance to risk its soldiers by using firepower and ruthlessness against non-US civilians, tends to have very un-humanitarian effects. A year after the Iraq invasion, there should be little doubt

Could we imagine building a front for the potentials of peoples and democratic movements in Sudan, hurt and disaffected by war, with the solidarity of the global anti-war movement, to impose democratic mechanisms caring for the interests of oppressed Sudanese communities, races, cultures and classes, against the rapacity of the interests of US and Western European Imperialists? Could this aim be possible? Is it promising for the global justice and peace movement to regain its momentum, instead of supporting undemocratic authoritarian and fundamentalist forces, this time in Sudan, under the title of allying with whomever is against the American Empire? ★



about any of these points.

Proposals for an African Union intervention, however flawed, could have the best chance of success (it was African intervention that brought the Congo civil war to a halt). Genuine concern for victims of atrocities should not be transmuted by interventionist hypocrites into apologetics for an imperialism that will ultimately produce more victims of more atrocities. But those same victims deserve better than mere denunciations of intervention and its apologists as hypocrites and warmongers.

Perhaps Khalid Fishawy and Ahmed Zaki of Egyptian alternative media site kefaya.org pose the challenge for movements best:

The mess after the coup in Haiti

An interview with journalist and activist, Jean Saint-Vil

KEVIN SKERRETT recently spoke with JEAN SAINT-VIL on the current situation in Haiti. Saint-Vil is an Ottawa-based activist within the Haitian diaspora in Canada. He has been a featured political analyst on CBC television's (now cancelled) *Counterspin*, CPAC's *Talk Politics*, and CBC Radio's *The Current*. He is also a radio journalist, host of CKCU-FM's "Rendez-Vous Haitien" and CHUO-FM's "Bouyon-Rasin."

KS: First of all, the recent devastation of Haiti by Hurricane Jeanne has brought Haiti back into the media's lens. Of course, the focus is on the humanitarian plight of those killed and suffering, which is understandable. However, the continuing struggle over the territory of Haiti, among the armed gangs and ex-military under Guy Philippe, the small UN military force, and the national police force is never discussed. What are your comments on what is happening now, and the consequences of the February 29th coup that brought to power an unelected, US-selected government?

JSV: These things are linked. What's happening right now in Haiti is the consequence of not having an operating state apparatus. There was no effort to evacuate the population before the flood, when people knew that flooding was going to happen as a result of Jeanne passing through this area. Seven days after the events, there has been no effort to relocate

the people affected. Some of the convoys going to Gonaives are being attacked. And, what is not presented in the news is that one of the reasons for these riots is that the local authorities are not there. When people talk about the coup, they talk about it being against President Aristide, they don't recognize that it's also the elected officials from the year 2000 elections that were cancelled. In place of those elected officials are criminals, gang leaders, former CIA employees that were hiding in the Dominican Republic and armed by the US and used to overthrow the government. You have a situation where the population is completely left to its own devices, and seeing some of its former torturers who are now walking side-by-side with UN soldiers, and basically controlling the food rations after they've spent days without food, without water, etc. So, it's unfortunate that so many media reports are focused on the sensational images, but not on the true story of what is happening.

Now people are talking about all the help

that Canada and France are sending, but the doctors that are actually in Haiti are Cuban. And the Cuban doctors that are there have been there for some time, as there was a program of collaboration between Haiti and Cuba and there are actually Haitians from the peasant class in Cuba studying to become doctors, and part of their contract was to come back to Haiti. So, it's the Cuban doctors that are in Haiti right now that are doing most of the help.

KS: Let's talk about life in Haiti after the coup. There have been a number of international human rights delegations to have visited post-coup Haiti, and all of them – from what I've read – have concluded that the coup government installed by the US and France (with Canadian complicity) has unleashed a wave of terrible repression against the population, particularly activists from President Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas movement. Various reports have suggested that hundreds have been killed, and thousands are in hiding. Virtually none of this has been reported by the mainstream media. In general terms, what is your sense of life under the coup government of Gerard Latortue?



ALL PHOTOS: KEVEN SKERRETT

Two months after the US / French / Canadian coup, a French soldier picks up a few souvenirs at the airport on his way home

Kevin Skerrett is a trade union researcher who traveled to Haiti in late April of this year with a delegation of US-based trade unionists investigating the labour and human rights situation of Haiti following the February 29, 2004 coup that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.



This bus was one of over 50 that were burned and destroyed in the days of confusion following the Feb. 29th coup. The buses were owned and operated by a worker co-op that had been operating successfully under President Aristide.

JSV: Everyone is complaining. Even those who participated in the coup, from the private sector, who financed the coup, some of them if you go on their websites right now, they are complaining. Of course, they're complaining for all the wrong reasons. They're complaining because their business is not up and running fast enough, they're complaining because there's corruption in the government, etc.

But the real nightmare is for the general population. Food prices have gone up astronomical amounts. In terms of security, people have been killed in significant numbers. Just this week, I just read that they discovered 14 bodies in Delmas between Saturday and Sunday. And, it's not making the news here, it's very slowly filtering out, because the attitude of the French, the American and Canadian media is that, you know, we've restored peace and stability in Haiti, and those things don't fit that propaganda image, so you don't hear them talk about it.

KS: What is the latest word on when they are promising that elections will take place?

JSV: Oh, they keep on talking about December 2005. But, already we are hearing people say that it's probably not going to happen.

KS: Many Canadians probably recognized the hand of US imperialism in what happened, but were still influenced by the demonization of Aristide in the mainstream media. It is also the case that what we might call the "left" in Haiti did have its divisions. How do you view President Aristide, and what he represented politically, and the different responses to him on the ground in Haiti?

JS-V: I see President Aristide as I see Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, or Patrice Lumumba of the Congo. Human beings who were given incredible responsibility that they could only achieve with the collaboration of other people that had the same vision as them. Unfortunately, like Nkrumah in Ghana, like Lumumba in

Congo, Aristide was operating in an environment where his enemies were powerful and his friends, at best, confused.

As you just said, there is a powerful minority of the left in Haiti that has visibility and access and privilege, who opposed Aristide and made those calls of 'dictatorship' and whatever, whereas when you compare what Aristide has done in his term in office with what the history of Haiti has been, or even, I would dare say with leaders such as Putin in Russia or George Bush in the United States, Aristide should be considered an angel when compared with them.

KS: It seems to me, one of the first measures that you have to take in terms of the 'dictatorial' character of a government is, how much freedom of expression and opportunity to express opposition on the ground. So, let me ask you, how much room was there for the opposition to maneuver on the ground over the last few years of Aristide's government?

JSV: The opposition had more room than the government! OK? I went to Haiti in December. I would wake up in the morning, the first thing you would hear on the radio – and the radio is controlled by the small business elite in Haiti – would be criticisms of the government going as far as obscenities. What they were doing was daily street demonstrations on the main area where people have to go about their business, they were closing schools, and everything. And that was being encouraged by the US embassy and the Canadian and the French embassies.

KS: Probably the most important thing I learned when I went to Haiti in April of this year was the importance of Kreyol, as a language and a culture of the people, for understanding Haitian politics. In particu-

What's happening right now in Haiti is the consequence of not having an operating state apparatus.. in place of elected officials are criminals, gang leaders, former CIA employees that were hiding in the Dominican Republic and armed by the US and used to overthrow the government.



A mural on the wall of the union hall of the CTH - Haitian Workers Confederation. The sign reads: *Solidarity, Organization, Social Power.*

Haiti than the church that Aristide was working within. When he became a politician, he had an advantage over all of these politicians, and that's why even today, if you ran an election in Haiti right now, he would win again. Even if you put those 15 parties that the US has put together to create the [Democratic] Convergence, he would beat them again. And that's why the coup was necessary. Otherwise they would have had a referendum like they tried in Venezuela, but they would have lost.

lar, President Aristide seems to have revolutionized the political culture there by using and supporting Kreyol, something that the educated and wealthy elite – including some on the 'left' – never did. What are your comments on the importance of Kreyol to Haitian political life?

JSV: Not only to Haitian political life, but Haitian life, period. Nothing serious gets done in Haiti other than in Kreyol. People will say, what are you talking about, all the state documents are in French. Well, that's because those things are not the serious things. Let's just take an example. An architect in Haiti may speak French, but none of the masons working to build the house speak any language other than Kreyol.

So, when President Aristide started out as a priest, he was following the liberation theology line of the church in Haiti. Because, it's not every priest in Haiti that speaks Kreyol – in fact, that in itself was a revolution within the church, and that's why the church split in two. The liberation theologians used Kreyol, and introduced drums in the church, whereas the elite kept with the clergy that was more powerful with the Vatican, and they kept French. They even kept Latin for the longest time. And, of course, they had practices where there were some rich people in Haiti that had their own pews reserved for them. That was a totally different Catholic church in

KS: One last question. I wanted to ask about the extent to which you saw solidarity activists and anti-war activists take up Canada's role in the coup in Haiti. You spoke at a rally here in Ottawa on March 20th, and I understand that the anti-war

group in Vancouver has taken it up. However, there was a lot of confusion among many, and so anti-war and anti-imperialist messages remain focused on the occupation of Iraq. How would you like to see the issue of Haiti taken up by progressives and activists, who do understand US imperialism?

JSV: I think we started to see some good things happen. Haiti has not drawn attention like Iraq, or Afghanistan, but of course, the situation in Iraq, you can't belittle that either. That's a brutal destruction of a people's culture, civilization and everything, and it's in the news every day. But, I think for instance that the major demonstration that we had on March 20th, right here in Ottawa, the anti-war movement at that time realized what was going on in Haiti and recognized that there was a need to decry the occupation of Haiti, and since then, there's been some things happening. For instance Canadian journalist Anthony Fenton has done some amazing work unmasking the role that Canada has played in the coup. ★

For further information on the situation in Haiti, see the collection of material at Znet (www.zmag.org), as well as San Francisco's Haiti Action Committee (www.haitiaction.net).



The occupation of Iraq and challenges to US imperialism

BY HAROLD LAVENDER

Will the US empire be able to successfully dominate the globe in the future? Or are we witnessing a decline in US power as it is drawn deeper into the Iraqi quagmire?

Today the Pentagon controls the most expensive, most technologically advanced and most destructive military arsenal in the world and the Bush administration has accelerated the unilateral use of this power to effect regime change in Iraq.

The US conquest of Baghdad in spring 2003 was a high-water mark in US imperialism's exercise of unlimited power. But little more than a year later, premature celebrations have given way to fretful sobriety.

A limited, but real, debate within US ruling circles questions what has gone wrong in Iraq and how to fix the problem. But both Republicans and Democrats share a commitment to US global domination, and neither support pulling out of Iraq. Thus the US election was never going to fundamentally change things.

The brief US triumph in Iraq masked military, political and economic problems for US imperialism.

The US has an overwhelming advantage in terms of weaponry and powers of destruction. However, US forces cannot control the situation in Iraq. Despite the massive deployment of troops there (approximately 160,000), many in the Pentagon feel that that number is too low to stabilize the situation.

During the war of conquest, US casualties (unlike Iraqi) were remarkably low. They have steadily mounted during the extended war of occupation. The US military lost many strategic advantages and is now engaged in a dangerous mission in a hostile land.

Some of the tactics used by armed insurgents in Iraq, such as suicide bombers, car bombs, kidnappings and executions (although highly unsettling) have been effective in shattering the illusions of a safe, secure and stable Iraq under benign US tutelage.

US occupation of Iraq has generated a powerful backlash, a mixture of nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism. The goals of much, if not all, of the emerging Iraqi opposition and insurgency are neither left nor secular. However, the armed revolt appears capable of inspiring large numbers

tion, it lost the peace. This led to a shift in tactics. While employing brutal force to crush the insurgency, Washington is also now seeking to hide its controlling hand behind an Iraqi flag.

At the end of June, power was formally transferred to a new Iraqi government. A fresh pro-US face, Iyad Allawi, was brought in as interim prime minister. However, his authority has not been widely or popularly respected, and the insurgency is growing. The elections scheduled for January 2004 are supposed to make Iraq a "democratic country" and give credibility to the occupation. Meanwhile, Allawi is being paraded before the US congress and the UN as the savior of Iraqi "democracy." However, he is not a big fan of democratic rights and, in fact, plans to utilize martial law to smash the growing insurgency.

As part of the "transfer of power," the US wants the Iraqi regime to take more responsibility for repression. However, to date the policy has not succeeded. Some 100,000 security and police recruits are being trained, with efforts to double that by the end of 2005. But fighting capacity remains low and recruits for future

state repression and terror are themselves subjected to terror tactics. As a result, there is no security to reconstruct and reorient the economy. The oil industry, with which the US expects to finance the new regime, is in disrepair and regularly sabotaged.

Since the US occupation and the beginning of the Allawi regime, living conditions in Iraq have dramatically worsened. Basic services such as electricity have not been fully re-established. Unemployment has soared dramatically under the occupation, prices have risen and, for the large majority, living standards have declined and become much more precarious. This mass despair, in turn, is a fertile recruiting ground for armed groups and religious fundamentalists. All the ingredients are present for an intense power struggle and a descent into further violence and civil war which will impede US aspirations in the region.



of people with both the hatred and conviction to fight and die to resist US imperialism.

In response, Pentagon planners are preparing to escalate the war in Iraq after the US election. The current inability of the US military to suppress Iraqi resistance will require intensified use of military firepower and reinforcements. The number of troops in Iraq will probably be increased, while the threat of a renewed military draft hangs over US youth if this (and future wars) begin to suck up troops and lives.

The reality of occupation is beginning to sink in for the US government. To be able to win the war, the new administration in Washington will need to win political battles inside Iraq, internationally and within the US.

The US won the war in conquering Iraq. But during the period of military occupa-

Harold Lavender is an editor of New Socialist magazine.

John Kerry correctly pointed out that Bush's "more of the same" would not resolve the situation in Iraq. Dismissing Bush's coalition of the willing, Kerry pointed out that the US is currently taking 90 per cent of coalition casualties and paying 90 per cent of the costs. However, Kerry's solution to rebuild US alliances, further involve the UN and get others to share the burden of Iraq was as illusory as Bush's stay-the-course rhetoric.

Quick, decisive victory in Iraq would have enabled the US to leverage its military superiority and willingness to use force into political domination. The US would get the reconstruction contracts, the dominant position in a neoliberal opening of the Middle East, secure oil supplies and leverage to break OPEC's ability to control prices, etc. And it would be better positioned to strong-arm other nations in trade negotiations. Whether the US can still accomplish these things remains to be seen.

But as the US becomes entrapped in Iraq, most countries are increasingly reluctant to come to the US's aid. Bush has been campaigning hard for the forgiveness of the Iraqi foreign debt. It is a blatant attempt to transfer war costs from the US to other nations. France and Germany, acting out of their own self-interest, refused.

The number of countries willing to send troops, furthermore, is shrinking. Involvement in an expanding war means casualties. Meanwhile there is no security for a UN or international relief agency presence and kidnappings are mounting, which discourages relief efforts.

Underlying the reluctance to support the US occupation is politics.

The global anti-war movement reached unprecedented size prior to the war. Although it lost some momentum during the war, it has helped to question the war and shape public opinion around the world, which has opposed the war. Unless mass perception changes, very few countries are likely to step up to the plate.

Take Canada. The Liberals have acted on corporate pressure to improve relations with the US. Examples include military deployments in Afghanistan and Haiti, tightened national security and immigration and refugee policy, plans to boost the military, moves towards joining US weaponization of space and Paul Martin's promotion of UN forces for humanitarian interventions. Regardless of Canada's attempt to align itself with US interests, sending Canadian troops to Iraq is not in the cards.

But Bush will continue to wage war. Iraq is a highly strategic country with huge oil reserves. Oil is a vital commodity in the global economy. The American ruling class is unlikely to walk away voluntarily.

The Pentagon is far from defeated if it enjoys the active or passive support of a sizable majority of the US population for its war efforts. This is not impossible if the politics of fear prevail. Concern for homeland against the forces of darkness, if unchallenged, could feed racism, xenophobia, support for aggression abroad and increased repression at home.

Only the re-emergence of an independent and mobilized anti-war movement in the US can prevent the US from becoming more deeply embroiled in this war.

The current over-extension of US power may bring some temporary comfort to

others. It does make it less likely Bush will jump to invade other countries in the Middle East or intervene directly in Latin America. And there could be further resistance to trade blocs dominated by US corporate interests, from the FTAA to the WTO.

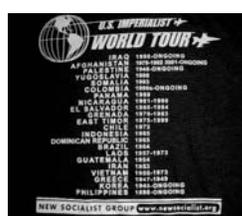
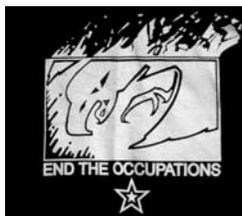
However, the problems of the world are not reducible to the excessive power of US imperialism. Without the emergence and strengthening of alternatives to global capital nothing will change for the better. The existence of rival centers of power, such as a more assertive and independently-minded European Union, does not guarantee a peaceful world. Previous struggles for dominance among imperialist powers led to World Wars I and II.

The budding shift in the world situation may present new opportunities but also dangers. ★

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KEYWORD

A Primer on Zionism

BY DAVID FINKEL

“Zionism could well turn out to be a passing episode in Jewish history, a parenthesis that has been both brutal (for its victims) and tragic (for its protagonists). The second kingdom of Israel was shorter and less glorious than the first; why can't the third be even more ephemeral and even less honorable?”

Michael Warschawski
Israeli socialist and activist

The fashionable claim by proponents of political Zionism is that “Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people.” The intended meaning of this is: If you oppose Zionism, you disrespect Jewish suffering and dignity, therefore you're for “the destruction of Israel” and you're an anti-Semite.

Every one of these claims is false, both in fact and in logic. To understand why, we have to deconstruct that claim piece by piece and clarify what Zionism was and is. I'll use the term Zionism here to mean “political Zionism,” which demanded the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. At the beginning there were other Zionists who proposed creating a Jewish homeland rather than a state. Honorable people like I.F. Stone and Noam Chomsky have identified with this tradition, but it was political Zionism that ultimately mattered.

What's true is that political Zionism arose in the late 19th and early 20th century, as a form of Jewish nationalism. (Although it has a pre-history as a movement among evangelical Christians to return the Jews to Palestine, before any Jews were much interested, we'll ignore that historical footnote here.) That's the only part of the claim that's true. Zionism arose as a nationalist movement in late 19th century Europe, both in the context of other European nationalisms and as a

response to the growth of racist anti-Semitism.

But Zionism was only one form of Jewish nationalism, and a highly peculiar one. It was in competition with the working class, socialist Jewish nationalism of the Bund, which sought to liberate the Jewish people where they lived, on the basis of their Yiddish culture and as part of the overall struggle for human freedom. There was the explicitly anti-territorial Jewish nationalism advocated by the great historian Simon Dubnow for example. And of

course there were even more Jewish liberals, socialists and communists, conservatives and others who weren't nationalists at all.

Up to the Nazi genocide, most Jews and even most Jewish nationalists rejected Zionism. Even in the 1930s, in the shadow of fascism, the historian William Rubinstein has shown that support for Zionism among Jews worldwide cannot have been more than 15 percent. To understand why, you have to look at the peculiar character of Zionism as an ideology.

- Zionism was highly peculiar in proposing not to establish a nation-state where the people it claimed to liberate actually lived, but to transfer them wholesale to a different place – to Palestine, where the Jewish religious tradition began but where few Jews had lived for over 1500 years.

- Zionism was highly peculiar in its contempt for the actual culture of the people it claimed to liberate, i.e. the Yiddish culture of Eastern European Jews. Its attitude toward non-European Jews of the Middle East and Africa was much worse, but in this respect it shared the racist assumptions of most European nationalism. It proposed to replace Yiddish language and culture with Hebrew, which Jews had not spoken except for prayer and scholastic study for many centuries.

Zionism was distinctive in the degree to which it relied on the sponsorship of colonial powers to carry out its project of national construction.

- Zionism was distinctive in the degree to which it relied on the sponsorship of colonial or imperial powers to carry out its project of national construction. The founding father of the Zionist movement, Theodore Herzl, was very conscious of its role: “We shall build there [in Palestine] a protecting enclave of Europe against Asia, civilization against Asiatic barbarism.” After a flirtation with Turkey, following World War I the Zionist movement allied itself with Britain, which

David Finkel is a member of the US socialist organization Solidarity (www.solidarity-us.org) and an editor of the magazine AGAINST THE CURRENT.



Left: Jewish Bund members in the ruins of Warsaw Ghetto. Right: Odessa, 1903 - Jewish Socialist Defense Guard

nurtured the Zionist colonial settlement in Palestine at the expense of the native Arab population.

It is hardly surprising in view of all this that the large majority of the Jewish people rejected Zionism. Most Orthodox Jews opposed it on religious grounds, as a secularist usurpation of God's unique role in bringing about the Messianic era. Reform Judaism in late 19th century America and Germany opposed it as a diversion from Jewish modernization and political emancipation. Socialist Jews reviled it for attempting to divide Jewish workers from the proletarian struggle. Most ordinary Jews regarded it as a curiosity irrelevant to their lives.

Even as the Nazi menace arose in the 1930s, Jews generally did not see Zionism or emigration to Palestine as the solution to their problems. And the mainstream of political Zionism, in fact, was not concerned with saving Jews from Germany or Eastern Europe; David Ben-Gurion was concerned with bringing to Palestine young Jews or those with capital, not the large numbers whom he scorned as petty traders. Zionism indeed did not attempt – and to be honest, could not have succeeded even had it tried – to rescue millions of European Jews from the Nazi genocide.

The obvious question, then, is how such a historically late colonial movement could have succeeded after most Jews either opposed or were indifferent to it, and when Palestinian and other Arabs obviously did everything they could to stop it. There were basically three reasons:

First, Zionist settlement in Palestine was highly advantageous to British imperialism

in the inter-war period. The British colonial (so-called “Mandate”) administration afforded substantial economic advantages and military protection to the Yishuv (Jewish settlement community). The Zionist movement by the 1940s was also highly skilled in promoting itself as an ally in controlling the strategic Middle East to the rising imperialist power, the United States.

Second, the Zionist movement in Palestine was very well organized and strategic in its planning, while the Palestinian population was poorly organized, very badly led and dominated by feudal landlords, often absentees who sold land to Zionist settlers without the peasants' knowledge. In addition, the Zionist project succeeded in the revival of the Hebrew language as a crucial factor in the identity of a new nation.

Third, the debate in the Jewish world was never “won” by the Zionist argument. Rather, Nazi genocide and brutal Stalinist repression ended the argument, as most of European Jewry was wiped out and Jews in the Soviet bloc were cut off. The end of World War II saw several hundred thousand Jewish survivors in Displaced Persons camps, with no homes to return to and no place to go except Palestine (as western governments and the Zionist movement had no interest in opening other borders to the survivors).

This mass of desperate people furnished the critical mass that finally gave political Zionism the base for a Jewish State in Palestine. As the Zionist leadership rejected bi-nationalism in any form, it carried through the other option – the war of

ethnic cleansing that Israel celebrates as the War of Independence and Palestinians commemorate as the *Nakba* – setting the stage for the half century of further conflict and tragedy that has followed. Nonetheless, the creation of a new Hebrew-speaking nation in Palestine/Israel was an accomplished fact – a tragic fact that would not have occurred had the Jews of Europe not been annihilated, but an undeniable fact anyway. ★

FURTHER READING

- Michael Warschawski, *Toward an Open Tomb: The Crisis of Israeli Society* (Monthly Review Press, 2004). Warschawski's book is a concise, readable and terrifying account of the impact of the occupation on Palestinian and Israeli life. I recommend that all readers make a point of reading this book and circulating it within peace and liberal Zionist circles.
- Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951* (I.B. Tauris, 1992), for a more detailed history than can be provided here.
- Uri Davis, *Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the Struggle Within* (Zed Books, 2003), on the legal structure of the Israeli State.

SEVEN THESES ON THE *CURRENT PERIOD*, THE *WAR* AND THE *ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT*

BY GILBERT ACHCAR

This text was originally written for the general assembly of the French anti-war organization "Agir contre la guerre". It was translated from French by **Raghu Krishnan** for *New Socialist*.

ONE

THE IRAQ OCCUPATION IS ENTIRELY IN KEEPING WITH THE expansionist "grand strategy" initiated by the US at the end of the Cold War.

The end of the USSR was a major turning point in history, equal in importance to the 20th century's two world wars. Each of these turning points ushered in a further phase of US imperial expansion. With the First World War, the US graduated from its status as a regional or minor world power to that of a major world power. It went on to become a superpower following the Second World War, within the framework of a bipolar world, divided up between the two empires of the Cold War.

The decay and final implosion of the USSR confronted the US with the need to choose between major strategic options about "shaping" the post-Cold War world. Washington decided to perpetuate its supremacy, in a world that had become unipolar in the area of military force, where it held a major advantage in the global competition between imperialist states. The era of US hyperpower was inaugurated by the first Bush administration's war against Iraq in January-February 1991, the year of the USSR's final collapse.

The 1991 war was decisive for "shaping the world." It enabled the US to simultaneously fulfill a number of major strategic objectives:

- a massive return of direct US military involvement in the Gulf region, home to two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. We are

at the beginning of a century which will see a growing shortage and exhaustion of this most strategic of resources. The return to the Gulf has given the US a dominant position in relation to both allies and potential rivals, all of whom – save for Russia – are hugely dependent on oil from the Middle East.

- a striking demonstration of the crushing superiority of US weaponry over the new dangers facing the world capitalist order in the form of "rogue states" – dangers exemplified by the predatory behavior of Baathist-run Iraq, and the precedent of the "Islamic Revolution" in Iran which had brought to power a regime evading control by the two Cold War superpowers. This show of force played an important role in convincing Washington's key allies, the European powers and Japan, of the need to renew the vassalage relationship that had been established following the Second World War between themselves and their new American overlord. Upholding NATO and transforming it into a "security organization" were part and parcel of the renewal of this hierarchical relationship.

At the same time, the US return to the Middle East inaugurated a new and final historic phase in the development of Washington's global empire. The US could now extend the network of military bases and alliances with which it encircled the globe to those regions of the planet that had previously escaped its control because they had been under Moscow's domination. NATO expansion to Eastern Europe, armed intervention in Bosnia and the Kosovo war were the first stages of this completion of imperial globalization, carried out under the Clinton administration. Successful pursuit of this process

Gilbert Achcar's latest books in English are The Clash of Barbarisms: Sept. 11 and the Making of the New World Disorder and Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror, both from Monthly Review Press.

required favorable political conditions, especially given the persistence of the “Vietnam syndrome” which hampered Washington’s expansionist military ambitions.

TWO

THE SEPTEMBER 11 2001 TERRORIST ATTACKS PROVIDED THE administration of George W. Bush with an historic opportunity to dramatically accelerate and complete this process in the name of the “war on terror.”

The invasion of Afghanistan and the war against the Al-Qaeda network were the ideal pretext for the expansion of US military power into the heart of formerly Soviet-controlled Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) and the Caucasus (Georgia). Aside from the oil and gas riches of the Caspian Basin, Central Asia provides the inestimable strategic interest of being located at the heart of the Eurasian landmass – between Russia and China, the two main potential adversaries of US political and military hegemony.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq aimed to complete work that had remained unfinished in 1991 due to the impossibility at that time of embarking upon a long-term occupation of the country – for reasons of both international politics (the limited UN mandate, the existence of the USSR) and domestic politics (public reluctance, a limited mandate from Congress). With its occupation of Iraq, its ongoing domination of the Saudi kingdom and military presence in the other emirates of the Gulf region, the US now has direct control of more than half of the planet’s oil reserves, in addition to its own domestic reserves. Washington is actively seeking to further tighten this global grip on oil resources by spreading its hegemony to Iran and Venezuela, its priority targets after Iraq.

THREE

The strategic decision to pursue and complete US unipolar domination of the world is the corollary of the neoliberal orientation adopt-ed by global capitalism and imposed on the entire planet through the general process encapsulated by the term “globalization.”

In order to guarantee free access for the US and its partners in the global imperialist system to the resources and markets of the rest of the world, it is of vital importance to build up and maintain military forces up to the task. Such forces are also essential to guard against the non-economic threats to the system and markets created by the neoliberal agenda of social

cutbacks, extreme privatization and savage competition. Washington has elected to make the US “the indispensable nation” of the global system. As a result, the gap between the US and the rest of the world continues to grow. At the end of the Cold War, the US accounted for one third of global military spending; it now spends more than all other countries combined.

This formidable military superiority of the American hyperpower can be traced to the “militarism” inherent in the very concept of imperialism as defined by the English economist John A. Hobson at the turn of the last century. It has been magnified by the feudal-like hierarchical structure between the US overlord and its vassals that has been in place since the Second World War. Through this structure, a tutelary superpower took charge of most of the work of defending the capitalist system. It concretized the objective solidarity that exists between capitalist elites through an institutionalized subjective solidarity. The need for such solidarity had been demonstrated during the economic and political experience of the Great Depression, and became





flagrant in the context of the global confrontation with the Stalinist system.

For this hierarchical structure to become a single global imperial system, and for it to remain so, it was and will always be absolutely essential for the superpower – now a hyperpower – to maintain the military wherewithal in keeping with its ambitions. Strengthening America's role as protective overlord was at the heart of the projects of the Reagan administration and its huge increase in military spending to record peacetime levels. This made the US a military hyperpower by developing the "asymmetric advantage" of its forces over those of the rest of the world.

The end of the Cold War, combined with the economic constraints of public finances dangerously in the red, had led to a reduction and then a leveling off of US military spending in the first half of the 1990s. But there was a resurgence of post-Soviet Russian challenges to US objectives around NATO expansion (from 1994 on) and the Balkan crisis (1994-1999), as well as the emergence of a challenge from post-Maoist China, illustrated by the confrontation over Taiwan in 1996. When combined with the backdrop of increased military cooperation

between Moscow and Beijing, these developments led the Clinton administration to set in motion a long-term increase in military spending from 1998 onwards.

FOUR

THE RENEWED US RACE TO OVER-ARM ITSELF IN RELATION TO the rest of the world – picking up where the Cold War arms race with the USSR left off – was accompanied by a new approach in Washington towards the management of international relations.

Starting with the "Gulf crisis" in 1990, there was a passing infatuation of the US for the UN, accompanied by a belief that Washington could pursue its imperial objectives within an international legal framework attuned to its aspirations, as was the case for Iraq, Somalia and Haiti. These illusions were very short-lived and were initially jettisoned in order to carry out unilateral NATO action in the Balkans. At that time, Washington circumvented the Russian and Chinese vetoes at the UN Security Council by taking unilateral action through the US-led alliance, in the name of supposedly "humanitarian" concerns.

The new surge in military spending made possible by the September 11 attacks, the new consensus created by these attacks in relation to Washington's military expeditions – combined with the "unilateralist" predisposition of George W. Bush and his team – led the Bush administration to cast aside all institutional constraints to the pursuit of US military expansion. "Coalitions of the willing" under unchallenged US leadership even circumvented NATO, whose principle of unanimity granted the equivalent of veto rights to all member states.

The war of invasion in Iraq was a perfect opportunity to put this unilateralist approach into practice. The US point of view and interests were at odds not only with those of permanent members of the UN Security Council, such as Russia and China, who are generally opposed to US global hegemony, but also with traditional allies and NATO members, such as France and Germany. The overlap of interests and points of view between the governments of the US and the UK prompted them to carry out the invasion together, with the support of a few NATO members and a mix of docile and more zealous US allies.

The quagmire of the US-led coalition in Iraq and the Bush administration's difficulties running the occupation have provided a striking demonstration of the futility of their arrogant unilateralism, which had been criticized from the start by a section of the US establishment, including within the Republican Party and the entourage of Bush senior.

FIVE

THE IRAQ FAILURE HAS HIGHLIGHTED THE NEED FOR A RETURN to a more subtle combination of military supremacy and the fashioning of a minimum consensus with the traditional allied powers (NATO, Japan), if not with all the world powers in the

framework of the UN. Of course, consensus has a price. The US must skillfully take their partners' interests at least minimally into account while keeping the lion's share of the spoils for themselves.

Since the 1990-1991 turning point, Washington has felt that the UN's role as a testing ground and caretaker of the consensus between the big powers was obsolete. It sees the equality of rights (to veto) for the five permanent members of the Security Council as entirely outdated in a new unipolar world in which, in practice, only the US can exercise a veto in the area of international "security." Paradoxically, though, the world order was overturned through a UN resolution that Bush senior obtained in order to secure domestic support for his war against Iraq. Then, under Clinton, the UN was reduced to post-war care taking alongside NATO in the Balkans, in the territories invaded by NATO under US leadership. This same post-war caretaking formula was used once again in Afghanistan, following Washington's unilateral invasion.

Having led the invasion of Iraq, the US now faces the difficulties of running the occupation and would like to find an Afghanistan-type solution. The letter and, even more so, the spirit of the UN Charter are blithely violated. According to the Charter, wars of invasion are illegal unless they have been decided by the Security Council. As such, Washington's wars are no longer even legal, let alone just or legitimate. The 1991 war had only been waged in the UN's name – but not actually by the UN, as the UN general secretary himself put it at the time.

In any event, Washington only considers turning to the UN, or to NATO or any other multilateral body, when it determines that it will serve its purposes. The US has always reserved the right to act unilaterally in defense of its interests. International bodies are perpetually confronted with the blackmail of US unilateralism. This has dramatically depreciated the UN Charter since the end of the Cold War.

SIX

THE MAJOR POST-COLD WAR POLICY DIRECTIONS OF THE US-led world imperialist order have ushered in a long historic period of unbridled military interventionism. The anti-war movement is the only force capable of overturning this state of affairs.

Since the collapse of the USSR, the evolution of the global relationship of military forces has virtually eliminated all impediments to imperialist interventionism. In the case of the nuclear deterrent, only a suicidal state would brandish atomic weapons against the US – another matter being the case of a clandestine terrorist network not confined to any territory that could be targeted for reprisals. The main point is that no military force on earth can stop the steamroller of US hyperpower once it has decided to invade any given territory.

The only major power able to stop the imperial war machine is public opinion and its frontline detachments in the anti-war movement. Logically, the people of the United States play the

decisive role in this regard. The "Vietnam syndrome" – in other words, the impact of the spectacular anti-war movement that massively contributed to ending the US occupation of Vietnam – militarily paralyzed the empire for more than 15 years, from the sudden withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 until the invasion of Panama in 1989.

Since the military action against the Panamanian dictatorship, Washington has been attacking enemies that are easy to demonize given their hideous dictatorial character: Noriega, Milosevic, Saddam Hussein and so on. Moreover state and media propaganda blow things out of proportion whenever the need arises, i.e. if reality does not quite conform to the demonized image, especially in comparison with the West's allies. This was the case for Milosevic (compared to Tudjman, his Croatian rival), as it continues to be the case for the Iranian regime (compared to the far more obscurantist and medieval fundamentalism of the Saudi monarchy). Similar efforts are underway in relation to Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez.

Still, in 1990 Bush senior ran into some difficulty when he tried to obtain a green light from Congress for his military operation in the Gulf, in spite of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Similarly, the Clinton administration had problems getting support for intervention in the Balkans; and let us not forget its calamitous withdrawal from Somalia. This reflects strong and persistent reluctance within US public opinion and the impact of this uncertainty in the electoral arena. Unfortunately, this sentiment did not prevent the anti-war movement from



promptly collapsing after its revival in 1990 in response to the Gulf crisis.

The September 11, 2001 attacks gave the Bush administration an illusion of mass, unconditional support within Western public opinion for its expansionist designs dressed up as the “war against terrorism.” The illusion was short-lived. On February 15 2003, 17 months after the terrorist attacks, the US and the world saw the broadest anti-war mobilization since Vietnam – the broadest international mobilization ever in fact, around any cause. An expression of the massive opposition within global public opinion to the planned invasion of Iraq, this mobilization was nonetheless only a minority phenomenon in the US itself. The international movement had, as usual,

There is widespread belief in the US in the possibility of settling the question through the ballot box, whereas only mass pressure would force a withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.

contributed powerfully to the strengthening of the US movement, but the effects of September 11 – nurtured by a campaign of disinformation orchestrated by the Bush administration – were still too strong.

SEVEN

SETBACKS FOR THE US-LED OCCUPATION IN IRAQ HAVE created the conditions for a major shift in US public opinion and for a powerful and inexorable rise of sentiment in favor of bringing the troops home.

The problem this time around is that the frontline anti-war forces have seen a decline in activity since the invasion, although it should have continued to grow. This untimely retreat in the anti-war mobilization was caused by a number of factors. For one thing, the movement was quickly demoralized due to an outlook overly focused on the short term, although it was highly improbable that the movement would manage to prevent the invasion given the tremendous stakes involved for Washington. For another, there is widespread belief in the US in the possibility of settling the question through the ballot box, whereas only mass pressure would force a withdrawal of US

troops, given the bipartisan consensus around the importance of keeping a hold on Iraq. Finally, there is an illusion that the various armed actions against the occupation troops will be enough to end the occupation.

These views are at odds with the Vietnamese experience, too far removed from the awareness of new generations for the lessons to have remained in collective memory. There has not been the kind of continuity in the anti-war movement that could ensure such lessons are passed from one generation to the next. The movement that put an end to the US occupation of Vietnam was built over time, as a long-term movement, and not as a mobilization immediately preceding the outbreak of war and then demobilized once the invasion began. The movement had far fewer electoral illusions in the US given that it had been built under the Johnson Democratic administration and then peaked under the Nixon Republican administration. It was clear to the movement that, in spite of their impressive resistance, incomparably broader and more effective than Iraq’s, the Vietnamese were tragically isolated militarily and could not inflict a Dien Bien Phu on US troops – that is to say, a defeat comparable to the one that had ended the French occupation of their country in 1954.

This is even more evident in the case of Iraq. Leaving aside the heterogeneous character of the origin and form of violent actions – where terrorist attacks of a sometimes communalist character against the civilian population are combined with legitimate actions against the occupation forces and their local subordinates. The nature of the terrain itself makes it impossible to inflict a military defeat on the US hyperpower. This is why the occupiers are far more fearful of mass mobilizations of the Iraqi population, such as those that forced the decision to hold elections by universal suffrage by January 2005 at the latest.

Only a big upsurge of the anti-war movement, relayed by anti-war public opinion in the US and around the world and combined with pressure from the Iraqi people, can force Washington to release its grip on a country whose economic and strategic importance is far greater than Vietnam’s, and which has already cost so many billions of dollars to invade and occupy.

Iraq is only a potential “new Vietnam” from a political angle, not a military one. It is certainly the biggest quagmire for the US since 1973 – a quagmire whose repercussions are amplified by memories of Vietnam (proof of the persistence of the “syndrome”) and by the development of global media and communications since that time.

We have an historic opportunity to resume the momentum of February 15, 2003 and rebuild a long-term anti-war movement. This movement could transform the US-led Iraq adventure into a new Vietnam, in the political sense: a new long-term paralysis of the imperial war machine. Combined with the rise of the global mobilization against neoliberalism, this would open up the way for the profound social and political changes urgently needed in this world of spiraling injustice. ★

SWINGING TO THE LEFT



Billie Holiday

Jazz AND THE working-class movement

BY JONNIE BAKAN

Over the last century, the musical form known as “jazz” has undergone a remarkable shift in its social standing within American culture. Denigrated in the early decades of the 20th century as a “primitive” musical form that could corrupt the morals of its listeners, jazz is now frequently hailed as “America’s Classical Music.”

But one aspect of the development of jazz music has been absent from most accounts of its history – the important role played by the working-class movement in conditioning the changing relationship of jazz music to North American cultural life. The emergence of jazz as a central aspect of the North American popular music industry of the 1930s coincided in both time and place with a massive upsurge in the working class movement, as manifest in the great Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) industrial unionization drives of that decade, and in the widely-based “Popular Front” movement. In 1936, just as big band jazz, or “swing” music was beginning to become the dominant musical form in American popular music, three general strikes occurred in the US.

Not coincidentally, Harlem, the artistic epicenter of jazz in the 1930s, emerged as a main center of working-class political activity during that decade.

It was in this social context that, by the late 1930s and early 1940s, many prominent jazz artists had become involved in various aspects of the left-wing movement, including Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman, Teddy Wilson, Frank Sinatra, Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, and others. As late as 1951 or 1952, Charlie Parker and Max Roach played a benefit dance in Harlem’s Rockland Palace for Communist leader Ben Davis. Paul Robeson also sang at the event. According to Gerald Horne, the presence of these leading jazz figures at the Communist benefit “was not atypical. Just before this event [the benefit featuring Charlie Parker and Max Roach], Miles Davis’s Orchestra, with J.J. Johnson and Sonny Rollins, played at the pre-convention dance of the New York Labor League, a fraternal organization allied with the party. Miles Davis was blunt about this group: ‘They’re on the ball. They know what’s happening.’ But his other comment, ‘This country is beginning to make me neurotic,’ captured the intensifying sentiments of many blacks.”

“STRANGE FRUIT,” BITTER FRUIT

Perhaps more than any other leading jazz artist, Billie Holiday’s career path was strongly conditioned by her relationship to the left-wing movement. Indeed, the song

*Southern trees bear strange
fruit*

*Blood on the leaves and
blood at the root.*

*Black body swinging in the
Southern breeze*

*Strange fruit hanging from
the poplar trees.*

*Pastoral scene of the gallant
South*

*The bulging eyes and the
twisted mouth.*

*Scent of magnolia sweet and
fresh*

*Then the sudden smell of
burning flesh.*

*Here is a fruit for the crows
to pluck*

*For the rain to gather, for the
wind to suck*

*For the sun to rot, for the
tree to drop.*

*Here is a strange and bitter
crop.*

Jonnie Bakan is a musician, musicologist, and member/activist in CUPE local 3903

that first brought Holiday to national attention was her 1939 recording of "Strange Fruit," a powerful song of protest against the racist practice of lynching, which was composed by Communist Party activist Abel Meeropol (aka Lewis Allen). David Margolick writes that "Somewhere around 1935, Meeropol, in his early 30s at the time, saw a photograph of a particularly ghastly lynching. 'It... haunted me for days,' he later recalled. He wrote a poem about it, one which was originally to have appeared in the Communist journal *The New Masses* but first saw print...as 'Bitter Fruit'...in the January 1937 issue of *The New York Teacher*, a union publication. Meeropol set the poem to music, and in the late 1930s the song was regularly performed in left-wing circles — by the Teachers' Union chorus, by a black singer named Laura Duncan (at Madison Square Garden), by a quartet of black singers at a fund-raiser for the anti-Fascists during the Spanish Civil War."

The "Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees" is clearly meant to be understood as a lynched person. "Strange Fruit" was the first song to "confront the topic [of lynching] so directly". Indeed, the explicitly anti-racist and political character of the song's lyrics mark it as different from anything previously recorded by Holiday, and perhaps any jazz singer. As bass player John Williams put it, "the words were unheard of for a song, especially at that time".

The May 10, 1939 issue of *Variety* announced the release of "Strange Fruit" under the headline, "Anti-Lynch



Billie Holiday with Louis Armstrong

Propaganda in Swingtime, on a Disc." "Propaganda in swingtime will be released next week on a record cut by Billie Holliday [sic] for Commodore Music Shops of New York. Tagged 'Strange Fruit' the platter is a musical anti-lynching campaign, vocals pointedly objecting to southern [sic] hangings. It was cut two weeks ago."

CROSSING THE BAR

Holiday first recorded and introduced the song into her repertoire while working an extended engagement at Café Society, a nightclub in New York's Greenwich Village that was itself associated with the left-wing Popular Front movement. As New York's first major nightclub with an uncompromising policy of complete racial integration, the Café Society represented a hard-won beachhead in the battle for social equality. Helen Lawrenson, who was involved in the club's early operation, writes, "From the beginning, it was completely integrated: black and white performers, black and white patrons. This had never happened before, outside of a few Harlem places where the whites got the best tables".

For many in New York, the Café Society and later its sister club, the Café Society (Uptown), offered rare havens from widespread racial bigotry. Its policy of complete intolerance of racial segregation made it perhaps the only nightclub in Manhattan where a mixed-race party could go out for an evening's entertainment, assured that the club's management would protect them from harassment. A former patron recalled, "blacks and whites who wanted to go out

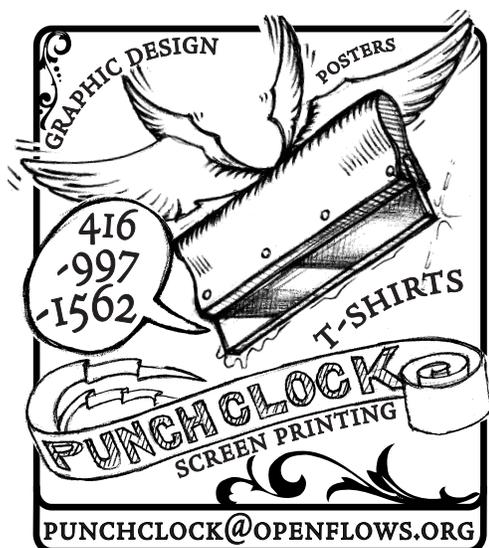
and spend a nightclub evening together didn't have too easy a time of it in Manhattan 40 years ago. But they never had any problem at Café Society".

The Café Society's owner Barney Josephson was well acquainted with New York's left-wing movement. While Josephson himself admitted only to being a formal member of the Communist Party for several months in 1937, his brother Leon, who reportedly worked as a business attorney for Café Society, was a prominent figure in the Communist Party. A member of the Workers' Party since 1924, Leon Josephson was a lawyer for the Communists' legal organization, the International Labor Defense (ILD), and according to David Stowe, one of "the more prominent and outspoken American communists of the era". Lawrenson recalls that "An admitted Communist, [Leon] was subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1948. He refused to answer questions and was sent to prison for contempt".

The Café Society itself had an unmistakable left-wing ambience. Jerry Zolten has recently written that "one way or another, political point of view [sic] found its way into the content of every show, if not every act. The strategy was to pull in the crowd with great entertainment and sway them with the political message". The club had a slogan that seems to sum up the atmosphere of self-conscious political transgression that permeated its operation: "The wrong place for the right people."

LADY SINGS SOCIETY BLUES

For those at Café Society who had a



personal commitment to the left-wing movement, Holiday's nightly performances of "Strange Fruit" would have resonated deeply with their own personal histories of political activity. Stuart Nicholson writes: "For the left-wing audiences at the Café Society, with The New Masses stuffed in their pockets ["Strange Fruit"] represented a powerful message delivered with a powerful punch".

But even for those club patrons who were not involved in the Popular Front movement, the song would have carried a powerful message, according to Nicholson. "As Billie reached the searing, climactic line, 'here is a strange and bitter crop', it was delivered with power and emotion that chilled the blood, forcing her predominantly white, middle-class audience to stare unblinkingly into the face of racist violence".

Holiday's recording of "Strange Fruit" generated a good deal of critical controversy. The song became a minor "hit," reaching the 16th position on the record

may be said, her name became inseparably linked with it for the rest of her life".

In her autobiography *Lady Sings the Blues*, Holiday herself comments "I opened Café Society as an unknown; I left two years later as a star."

Accounts of Holiday's early career contain multiple descriptions of the various personal and professional obstacles she faced, all posed by the systemic constraints of a racist and commercialized cultural environment. But things changed when Holiday began her artistic residence within the counter-hegemonic haven provided by Café Society, and, following the introduction of "Strange Fruit" into her repertoire, Holiday finally began to receive widespread critical acclaim.

By the late 1930s, a large left-wing political and cultural movement in the United States had developed to the point where it could actually establish its own performance venues, of which Café Society was just one of the more prominent. When Holiday sang "Strange Fruit" at Café Society, she

quent radicalization of large sectors of the population the phenomenon of 'Strange Fruit' would have been inconceivable.... New York's interracial Café Society... could not have existed earlier".

Today Billie Holiday occupies a central, even iconic status among the popularly recognized pantheon of "jazz greats" who constitute the "jazz tradition." Nonetheless the highly politicized dynamics that propelled her towards national fame, and her important relationship to the working-class and anti-racist movement of her day, have been almost entirely overlooked in virtually every popular history of "America's Classical music." ★

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The emergence of jazz as a central aspect of the North American popular music industry of the 1930s coincided in both time and place with a massive upsurge in the working class movement.

charts of the day. And while "Strange Fruit" appears neither to have been Holiday's first, nor her greatest chart-topper – her recording of "Carelessly," for example, reached number 1 for three weeks in 1937 – the song's success marked a crucial turning point in the singer's career. Burnett James notes that "[Holiday] never did make the top line with the general public or command the huge audiences she once hoped for, but once or twice she came near to it. The first time was in 1939, when she sang and recorded a number written specially for her [see above].... It was called Strange Fruit and it dealt with the lynching of Negroes in the South.... Whatever else

unambiguously identified her own artistic voice with the left-wing movement, while the movement simultaneously provided a large and responsive audience for the singer's music. Angela Davis writes that "Holiday realized... that 'Strange Fruit' would afford her a mode of expression that merged her own individual sensibility, including her hatred of racist-inspired brutality, with the rage of a potential community of resistance". It was this mutual relationship between artist and movement that allowed Holiday to emerge from Café Society, in her own words, as "a star." As Davis writes, "Before the vast movements of the 1930s and the conse-

Bureaucratization

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

the heart and soul of the labour movement in Canada.”

Without question, any attempt to strip the Rand Formula from the law must be opposed – like any other reactionary change to labour law. The removal of the Rand Formula in any province would throw unions there into chaos, strengthening bosses’ hands over workers in the workplace and emboldening capitalists to press other provincial governments to follow the leader.

But when right-wingers attack the Rand Formula, the last thing the labour movement should do is heap praise on it like NUPGE did. Far from being “the heart and soul of the labour movement,” the Rand Formula has contributed to the bureaucratization of unions. The duties it imposes on union officials give them a greater interest in opposing direct action on the job and policing workers, all for the sake of keeping the dues flowing. The mandatory payment of dues by check-off insulates officials from workers: when all workers must pay dues no matter what union officials do, officials have less reason

to respond to workers’ concerns. The Rand Formula is one of the reasons why, ironically, few unions today are capable of the kind of law-defying militancy and solidarity that won the 1945 Ford strike.

In 1946, the dangers of the Rand Formula were recognized by only a few insightful radicals. The Marxist paper *Labor Challenge* wrote that “The company, holding the check-off purse-strings, hopes to convert the union into a strike-breaking agency by compelling it to declare wildcat strikes illegal and to repudiate its own picket lines.” Almost sixty years later there is no excuse for uncritically defending the Rand Formula.

WHY THE BRASS LOVES IT

Why, then, does the labour officialdom sing such praises to it? For one thing, it guarantees the steady flow of union dues. More fundamentally, it’s one of the foundations of stable union institutions. The Rand Formula gives the blessing of the state to “responsible” unions – unions that negotiate pay and benefits, help to minimize strikes and direct action on the job, and endorse capitalism.

The NUPGE statement reveals what top officials think the “basis of Canadian trade unionism” is. For full-time officials (and those who aspire to become full-timers), acceptance by the state and employers is vital. It allows them to go about their business with a minimum of trouble. For the officialdom, the stability and legitimacy of union institutions are much more important than the power of unions as organizations of workers’ solidarity and struggle.

It is unlikely that any government in Canada will go after the Rand Formula in the short-term because this would provoke a major confrontation with the unions of a kind that many unionized employers see as unnecessary. But with the percentage of wage-earners in unions slowly declining, fairly low levels of workers’ confidence and resistance, and most labour leaderships cautious and compliant, it’s possible that a provincial government might decide to see what it could get away with.

Whatever happens, activists need to be clear about why we need to oppose right-wing attacks on the Rand Formula while at the same time pointing out how it strengthens the worst aspects of our unions and saps their real heart and soul: workers’ power. ★

Chavez’s record

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

REVOLUTION? REAL SOCIAL GAINS, UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Politically, substantial change has been instituted. The 1999 Bolivarian Constitution, written by an elected Constituent Assembly, has several progressive elements. These include the recognition of many indigenous rights and the recognition that domestic work done primarily by women is a fundamental contribution to the economy and therefore that women who work in the home will be entitled to social security. The Constitution also forbids foreign troops on the soil of Venezuela. At the same time, the Constitution does not protect a woman’s right to abortion, nor does it include anti-discrimination on the basis of sexual diversity, although in both these realms Chávez himself has pledged support. The Constitution, furthermore, guarantees the principle of free enterprise and private

ownership of the means of production. More simply, it is founded on the premise of a capitalist system.

Beyond the Constitution, Chávez has emphasized the notion of making democracy more participatory. The corresponding mobilization and self-organization of the urban shantytowns is remarkable and apparently building on earlier foundations. The politicization of class has intensified in Venezuela to an extent without precedent in the country’s history.

In terms of social policy, Chávez’s record is peppered with solid initiatives that improve the welfare of the poor. These include the slow and moderate yet nonetheless real initiatives in rural and urban land reform, Bolivarian schools and daycare programs, the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV), and the anti-poverty missions such as Mission Robinson, Mission Ribas, Mission Sucre, Mission Mercal, and Mission “Barrio Adentro,” which target education, food distribution and healthcare in poor communities.

The Economist (October 7, 2004), after an adolescent attack on the Venezuelan

president and his policies, nonetheless perceptively says of the Chávez regime: “Cuban-style socialism... it is not.” While the Bolivarian movement has increased state spending on social reform initiatives it has nonetheless always balanced this with guarantees for private property and business rights. In other words, Chávez has improved the lives of the poor without confronting the underlying class structures which determine their poverty in the long term. The fragile balance between sustaining welfare programs and succumbing to the essential demands of foreign and domestic investors has been made possible by unusually, and undoubtedly temporary, high oil prices. As Petras argues, “[Chávez’s] ability to balance classes, leaning in one direction or the other will depend on the continued flow of high returns from oil revenues. If oil prices drop, hard choices will have to be made – class choices.” How the class struggles play themselves out at that time will depend on the organizational capacities of the poor and the willingness of *chavismo* to decisively come to their side. ★

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Metropolitan Hotel worker Emily Tang speaks out about injustices in the workplace. See a recent speech by her on page 8.

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QUÉBEC CITY quebec@lagauche.com
and the **OUTAOUAIS** hull@lagauche.com

GAUCHE SOCIALISTE
CP 52131, Succ, St-Fidele, Québec, G1L 5A4
www.lagauche.com

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