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Review: *Latin America at the Crossroads*

Cuban Communist Makes the Case for International Revolution

By John Riddell

Roberto Regalado. Latin America at the Crossroads. Translation by Peter Gellert. Ocean Press (www.oceanbooks.com.au), 2007, US\$17.95; América latina entre siglos. Ocean Press, 2007, US\$17.95.

This compact book by Roberto Regalado, a veteran member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, strongly reaffirms the need for revolution in Latin America and beyond.

Regalado, a section chief in the Cuban CP's Department of International Relations, is anything but dogmatic. He is attentive to recent new trends in Latin American economics and politics and respectful toward the diverse currents of socialist opinion. He stresses the importance of the new features of Latin American social struggles: the role of peasants, the landless, indigenous peoples, women, environmentalists, and others.

But his careful and unpretentious analysis leads toward a striking conclusion: only a revolutionary seizure of political power by the masses can open the road to social progress south of the Rio Bravo and even within the imperialist countries.

Advent of neoliberalism

In just 232 pages Regalado provides a handbook of Marxist politics, outlining Marxism's basic anticapitalist premise and examining closely the evolution of revolutionary and reformist schools of thought through the twentieth century.

The dominant trend shaping the present situation, he argues, is the advent of "neoliberalism"—a concerted capitalist offensive aimed at sweeping away the gains made by working people during the last century and at deepening the subjugation of Third World countries.

Neoliberalism has entailed increased government intervention to increase capitalist profits, which, as Regalado points out, is a symptom of the system's crisis. Yet ironically, its advent led social democratic parties in imperialist countries to reaffirm that there is no alternative to accepting capitalist rule.

At their best, Regalado says, these parties aimed to rally support for neoliberalism's harsh measures in return for their more gradual implementation. "After having wagered everything on the welfare state," he adds, "the bankruptcy of that ideological construction today places ... [social democracy] in the public pillory." Unwilling to consider a perspective of superseding capitalism, its only course is total surrender.

As a result, the outcome of the great reformist experiment in imperialist countries is that "it was not social democracy that reformed capitalism, but capitalism that reformed social democracy."

Regalado argues that an anticapitalist strategy is urgent not only in the most oppressed nations but also in the richest and most privileged. Echoing a theme often voiced by Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro, he sums up his case:

"Rosa Luxemburg posed the problem in terms of 'socialism or barbarism.' Slightly more than seven decades after Luxemburg's death, barbarism threatens humanity's very existence."

Collapse of the Soviet bloc

In Regalado's view, the conditions governing working people's response to neoliberalism were greatly worsened by the collapse of the Soviet Union and allied Eastern European regimes during 1989-91, which led to a "strengthening of imperialist power, interference, and intervention on a world scale, and the erosion of the credibility of the ideas of revolution and socialism."

Without attempting a full analysis, Regalado notes two factors that led to the collapse:

- On the economic front, he quotes Panamanian theorist Nils Castro's comment that "Stalinist rigidity" led to placing "the priorities of bureaucratic political control and the perpetuation of the regime" above "those of the scientific and technical revolution," to the point where Soviet productive relations "wound up becoming obstacles" to the development of productive forces.
- Politically, Regalado notes that "the Soviet Union was not able to combine centralism with democracy." The ruling party and state "never managed to trust ... workers and peasants enough to allow them to exercise the democratic rights that Marx, Engels, and Lenin dreamt for them." Instead, "the perpetuation of power became the objective" of the ruling elite.

To this forceful analysis should be added the fact that the Stalinist elite pursued power not merely for its own sake but to protect massive economic privileges, frequently placing its narrow interests above those of world socialism.

Regalado notes that “socialist states” in Eastern Europe and Asia and also in Cuba followed “the general criteria of organization and the political and economic functioning of the Soviet Union, without questioning at the time” the so-called “Soviet model.”

This is clearly significant with regard to Cuba’s future path. Stalinist distortions in Cuba have received much discussion on the island. Yet with regard to the Cuban experience, Regalado is too modest. It is important to note the ways in which Cuba is fundamentally different from the other post-capitalist states that Regalado refers to.

Despite a couple of attempts, no privileged bureaucracy conquered Cuba’s Communist Party and government. Cuba’s internationalist perspective, as this book itself testifies, remained firmly oriented to the needs of worldwide liberation. And the Cuban masses have never been repressed and excluded from the exercise of power in the way that they were in the Soviet Union and under other Stalinist regimes.

Latin America thrown into turmoil

The second and longer part of *Latin America at the Crossroads* takes a close look at the region’s evolution during the last few decades. It briefly outlines the history and character of Latin American society since the conquest and provides an effective survey of major events of recent decades.

Regalado’s long involvement with the region’s politics enables him to provide striking portraits of significant turning points. Notable is his description of the fall of the FSLN government in Nicaragua in 1990. Sandinista errors and weakening Soviet support played a role, he says, but the decisive factor was the implacable U.S. war against the regime.

This forced the Sandinistas into a compromise peace that obliged them to “continue taking steps that weakened the foundations of revolutionary power.” In this context, the 1990 vote lost by the FSLN was a rigged election in which “it faced a certain defeat, although this was not foreseen by the Sandinista leadership.”

Regalado also notes the “violations of sovereignty, independence, and self-determination” represented by the forced removal of Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004 by U.S. – and, we must add, Canadian – troops and the subsequent fraud, perpetrated with Canada/U.S. support, in an unsuccessful attempt to deny victory to René Préval in the 2006 presidential elections. He criticizes the Latin American governments that are participating in the Haiti occupation for complicity in these crimes.

Neoliberalism’s devastating impact

Following the victory of the Cuban revolution, Regalado states, Latin America witnessed a wave of mass anti-capitalist struggles that placed imperialist rule in question in several countries. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, imperialism was largely successful, through direct intervention and through sponsoring brutal dictatorships, in quelling this wave of struggle.

“Once the ‘pacification’ of Latin America was accomplished and the subordination of the bourgeoisies of the subcontinent reaffirmed, the phase of institutionalizing the new system of continental domination by U.S. imperialism began,” he writes.

The three pillars of this new model, he explains, were affirmation of the forms of representative democracy, establishment of “free trade,” and an increase in direct U.S. military presence and control across the region. Foreign debt was utilized as the initial tool to break resistance by Latin American governments; they were then herded into hemispheric covenants which provided steadily increasing scope for U.S.-sponsored intervention in national politics.

As the U.S.-sponsored coup in 1990 against Haiti’s democratically elected president showed, the new order’s respect for “democracy” applies only to governments that play by Washington’s rules. Moreover, national elections are swayed by arrogant interventions by U.S. government agencies.

Traditionally, capitalist rule and exploitation in Latin America rested on a “system of social and political alliances,” which continued even during periods of dictatorship, Regalado says. During the decades since 1970, however, a “transnational concentration of wealth and political power has been imposed on the region.”

This evolution has “destroyed not only the social and political alliances” on which class rule had previously been based, but destroyed also “the economic and social matrix that would have permitted [this rule] to be restabilized,” Regalado says. This helps explain “why political, economic, and social crisis exploded everywhere in Latin America in the transition from the 20th to the 21st centuries.”

Toward conquest of political power

Despite major gains by popular movements, however, Regalado emphasizes that imperialist domination is still firmly entrenched in Latin America. Even where powerful popular upsurges have taken place, left parties lose far more elections than they win. Victory has come, he states, where the left has accumulated political capital over time and built unified, rooted movements. And even so, left victories in Brazil and Uruguay were insufficient to “endanger the institutional equilibrium.”

“Only in the elections of Chávez and Evo Morales was there a direct link between the weakness of the institutional political system, the rise in the social movements, and a popular political force taking office, in circumstances in which it was possible to break, at least in part, with the restrictions imposed by the model of domination.”

(Regalado’s book went to press too early for him to analyze recent victories of popular forces in Ecuador and Nicaragua.)

Regalado concludes with a ringing reaffirmation of the need for revolution:

“History shows that the reform of capitalism in progressive fashion is viable only in those places and at those moments when it was compatible with the process of capital

accumulation. This compatibility does not exist today, either in Latin America or in any other region of the world....

“Sooner or later, the popular content and capitalist ‘packaging’ of the political processes developed by the Latin American left today will lead to an untenable contradiction, because only a revolutionary social transformation, however it may be accomplished in the 21st century, will resolve the problems of Latin America.”

Regalado acknowledges the importance of attempts to redefine the concept of socialism through criticism of the “Soviet model.” He also underlines the importance of socialist democracy, which he defines in terms calling to mind the strengths of revolutionary Cuba:

“A political system ... based on mechanisms of popular participation and representation capable of establishing a consensus that guarantees unity of thought and action on the key points of socialist construction and of mutually reinforcing this unity through the free and constructive flow of all ideas and proposals that reflect the diverse interests of the sectors of society for whose benefit such an effort is being undertaken.”

And this, Regalado specifies, requires nothing less than “the seizure of political power” under conditions where “those holding power in the world will cling to it to the very end.”

The Spanish edition of *Latin America at the Crossroads*, updated from the English version, is being widely read and studied across Latin America. The book thus typifies the way in which Cuba’s example and ideas have served to introduce socialism to a new generation of fighters across the region. This is in itself an excellent reason for socialists and social activists in English-speaking countries to study it closely.

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People's Power in Venezuela

By John Riddell

“If we want to talk of socialism,” says Argenis Loreto, “we must first resolve the people’s most urgent needs: water in their homes, accessible health care, easy access to housing.”

In the Venezuelan municipality of Libertador (state of Carabobo), of which Argenis is mayor, “we have 90% poverty. Ending that is our first task. I am convinced that the existing state cannot do this.” It’s essential that “the majority of the people become part of the decision-making process.”

But when Argenis was elected in 2000, the second year of the Bolivarian government headed by president Hugo Chávez, he found that “the people did not possess the tools needed for their participation.”

That insight led Chávez and the Bolivarian government to initiate the formation of neighbourhood councils across the country—councils that they view as the embryo of a new people’s state.

Suzanne Weiss and I spent two days in Libertador, one of the first municipalities where such councils were formed, talking to Argenis and dozens of others. This report is based on what we saw; it also draws on Marta Harnecker’s outstanding study of the Libertador experience.*

A devastated community

With 200,000 residents, Libertador sprawls across a mainly rural territory the size of Metro Toronto (20 km. x 30 km.). Most of its employed population works in nearby Valencia, the country’s heartland of privately owned industry. Jouncing over its ruined roads in the back of a pickup, we saw a district that had been devastated not by natural catastrophe but by a social calamity—decades of systematic neglect.

“Before we had many problems,” recalls Félix Hernández, member of a community government. “The roads were super-awful. The electricity worked one or two days and then shut off. Health service was chaotic. Water service was complete chaos.”

Appealing to city hall was a waste of time. “It was horrendous,” says another council member, Virginia Diaz. “We’d go with petitions and explain. They’d visit and approve the project.” But nothing would happen. “When we went back to the office, they’d never heard of us, didn’t know anything.... As useful as tits on a bull.”

The result was public apathy, says municipal social activist Fidel Hernández—like Argenis, a published poet. “The people had let itself be convinced that it could not govern. There was a deliberate policy for this ... that’s why we had 1½ million who were illiterate.”

Tools for people’s power

Of peasant origins, Argenis Loreto finished only six years of schooling before starting his working life in factories, industrial management, farming, and again in factories. He joined a revolutionary group at age 17, took part in the Bolivarian movement's unsuccessful coup in 1992 and became mayor after two decades of underground activity.

Convinced that only the poor and disenfranchised could reconstruct his municipality—and his nation—he sought to bridge the gulf between them and the instruments of government. Argenis and his colleagues set out to do this by extending governmental structures to the community level and by delegating power to community governments. Such a shift was authorized by a decentralization clause (Article 184) in the Bolivarian constitution adopted in 1999.

Progress was slow at first. The right-wing coup and bosses' strike of 2002-2003 delayed restructuring. The Libertador plan ran into strong opposition from some Bolivarian national legislators, who accused Argenis of "creating illegal associations."

Finally, in 2006, the community structure was in place: 35 "social territories," which united residents that shared similar problems, a common project, and a sense of belonging to a common environment. They ranged in size from 1,000 to 15,000 residents. Each territory elected a government through assemblies of its residents, usually choosing between competing slates of candidates. All community government work is voluntary—no salaries are paid—but relevant expenses are reimbursed.

In one of the social territories, skeptical residents declined to name a council. In another, a centre of Libertador's small middle class, the opposition slate was elected. "Many right-wing oppositionists join in community council activity," says Argenis. "They feel they cannot stand aside from the social programs and local projects that the councils carry out.... The opposition's role in local government has helped ease political tensions here."

The people's power structure has two tiers. Each social territory or commune includes smaller and more homogenous communities, each of which has its own communal council. The size of component communities is determined by social geography: urban councils typically unite 200-400 families; rural councils, 20-50 families. The smallest social territory by population (Mont Vernon), is composed of dispersed mountain hamlets: it therefore includes the largest number of communities. In Libertador, there are 204 such communal councils.

Participatory budget

Each communal council and social territory holds assemblies to choose and prioritize its ten most needed projects for the coming year. The municipal planning council then evaluates the top three proposals from each territory—more than three, if finances permit. A value of 1 to 9 is assigned to each of a number of criteria: number of residents, number who will benefit, cost, how long the request has been pending, the number of previous projects in this community, etc.

This ranking creates a proposed project list that is presented to an assembly in each territory, which can change its priorities and request reconsideration—if for example a favored project turned out to be impossibly expensive.

Once the project list is decided, the required funds are allocated to the community bodies, which handle administration, buy materials, and engage workers or contractors, giving preference to cooperatives. Community networking and know-how helps keep costs down, and any savings stay in the community for other purposes. Argenis estimates that \$1 million a year is saved simply by eliminating private profits.

“For example, a flood control project was approved with a budget of 184 million bolivars [about \$90,000],” says Fidel Hernández. “But in fact the community councils did it for 47 million and had lots left over for fixing roads.

“In another case, the local council got a price of 80 million to bring electricity to a district. But in fact they managed to do three districts for that price.

“Last year the community councils spent 84% of the municipal budget [for projects],” Fidel notes.

Accomplishments

Popular control has steered funding toward small, plain, and inexpensive projects densely spread through local neighborhoods. Urgent human needs have taken priority over infrastructure requirements like road upgrades.

Argenis highlights the 74 primary-care health centres built by neighborhood councils, which at first sometimes even manufactured the bricks. “We had only nine centres before,” he says. In addition, Libertador boasts four Integral Diagnostic Centres—small hospitals—“the pride of our community,” according to Felix Hernández. Another community government member, Aixa Silvera, calls the Cuban doctors working in these centres “the most spectacular thing we have in the communities.”

Indeed, Libertador led the way in Venezuela by arranging for Cuban doctors to work in the communities, before this became a national program.

Argenis says that community governments are building 48 primary schools this year—mostly one-room structures serving a neighborhood. There are also now three university campuses in Libertador—part of a national program to “municipalize higher education.”

“As for sports, there are now only two or three communities that do not have a minimal installation” which means a playing field.

The citizens of Libertador are also trying to establish cultural centres in each social territory, usually an “open-air amphitheatre.” Eight cultural centres are now under construction. In some cases resident assemblies gave building a cultural centre priority over fixing the road or installing street lighting. “You can’t have a revolution without beauty,” Fidel Hernández says.

The obvious progress is confirmed by two surveys that were taken at the beginning of the community government program and again in May 2007. The first survey showed that the most urgently felt needs were for health care and educational facilities. In the second, no one cited health care as a concern, and almost no one mentioned education. Moreover, “we now have

hardly any kids on the streets,” says Argenis, “and the problem of homelessness is almost solved.”

The Housing Bottleneck

According to official estimates, Venezuela has a shortage of 2.7 million homes, while another 1.3 million dwellings are inadequate home-made shacks. In 2006, 200,000 homes were built—a positive achievement, but far less than what is needed.

Argenis believes that community councils, which feel this urgent need acutely, are best suited to build houses. Sometimes they “build 10, 12, even 15 houses with the money provided for seven,” he says.

“But we desperately need raw materials. Our economy was destroyed, and now we don’t have the capacity to make the cement blocks, the paint, the ceramic toilets. We’re working with Iran, China, and Brazil to meet these needs.”

And Venezuela is building six factories to produce plastic building materials—“we have oil, after all,” says Argenis. This project, called Petrocasa, will supply materials for 15,000 new houses a year. One of these factories, is close by, in the state of Carabobo.

National expansion

In 2006 Hugo Chávez endorsed the establishment of communal councils as a priority across Venezuela. In January 2007, he declared them institutions of “people’s power,” an embryo of a new people’s state. An enabling law was passed in April, and there are now more than 10,000 councils across the country.

While vindicating the innovative program in Libertador, this expansion also caused the municipality many headaches. The national government intended the councils to be free of the deadening hand of the traditional state bureaucracy. Among other things, word went out that mayors should not get involved with these people’s organizations. This directive might be appropriate in the nearby industrial city of Valencia, ruled by the opposition, but in Libertador it was totally at odds with reality.

Unfortunately, the Carabobo state government, led by critics of Argenis’s initiatives, seized on this opening to create problems for Libertador’s government. Utilizing its own statewide network of paid social activists, it promoted the notion that communal councils don’t need to work with Libertador’s larger social territories or with the city government.

“That caused a terrible process of fragmentation and division between the two levels of popular power,” says Argenis.

Much effort has gone into knitting the two levels of people’s government back together, Argenis says. “When they work together they’re unbeatable.”

People’s power was an element of the constitution reform narrowly defeated in the December 2, 2007, referendum. The communal councils are still authorized under Article 184 of the constitution and the April 2006 legislation, and there is no legal barrier to expanding the

structures beyond this framework. However, the referendum setback may encourage the councils' critics.

Bureaucratic obstruction

The community government bodies in Libertador aren't perfect. Among the occasional abuses noted by Argenis:

- Only one community is represented in a social territory council.
- One slate takes all the leadership positions.
- Elected officers take decisions on their own without convening the residents' assembly.
- The assembly functions poorly because of lack of interest.

These can be viewed as growing pains. As community government officer Omaira Carvallo comments, "When people see what is accomplished, it will break through their apathy."

More troubling is the conduct of other branches of government, such as the problems with Carabobo State. Among the many stories of this sort that Argenis tells, the pig manure episode is enough to illustrate what people's power is up against.

The city government makes special efforts to help Libertador's many farmers, a number of whom raise pigs. Some time ago the Ministry of the Environment banned hog-raising in the municipality because of concerns for water quality, but did not enforce the regulation. Libertador tried to help farmers solve the water problem on their own, by providing septic tanks for environmentally safe treatment of pig manure. The manure's polluting gas discharge was captured and burned for cooking. "This is a miracle," says Argenis. "It cuts out the smell and uses the gas!"

But the ministry intervened and nixed the project, which they said broke their rule against raising pigs. The bureaucratic method could not be better demonstrated: only the formal regulation counted; the real-life problem of manure pollution was of no interest.

What explanations do the ministry provide? "None whatsoever," says Argenis. "Just as we always say: this bureaucracy is eating us alive... We can't change things with this type of state."

Even among inherited municipal officials, "the apathy is barbaric. We have to establish a new conception of a staffer," Argenis says. "I'd like to dissolve the municipal administration ... and create a confederation of community governments."

Reflections

At first glance, Venezuela's people's power can seem to be just a formal structure—municipal government on a street level. This is misleading. The councils have appeared and made gains only as part of an immense popular movement on a national level: the Bolivarian revolution.

This revolution was born in the mass mobilizations against the U.S.-backed oligarchy's attempts to overthrow the country's elected government—by a military coup in 2002, by an economic

shutdown in 2003, and by an anti-Chavez referendum in 2004. All were defeated by the initiatives of masses of working people.

In Libertador, Argenis recalls, the embryonic community governments acted as defense committees, struggling to ensure that food, cooking gas, and gasoline reached the people. “That was just so wonderful,” he says. “Quickly we had a network of more than 200 Bolivarian shops,” distributing necessities and helping defend the revolution. Such national struggles were the true birth of people’s power.

Venezuela’s success at forging constructive ties with other non-imperialist states has also played a role, not just through Cuba’s contribution to health services, but above all in building alliances to help fend off, for now, a U.S.-led assault.

The sometimes destructive role of national and state authorities is also a reminder that the power of working people will not flourish at the street level unless it is consolidated nationally.

Yet the community councils in Libertador call to us, *Sí se puede!* – *Yes we can do it!* Enlisting the majority, the working people, in government is indeed possible. Venezuela’s people’s power—while still embryonic—is a living, viable reality.

* Marta Harnecker, *Gobiernos Comunitarios: Transformando el Estado desde abajo*. [Community governments: transforming the state from below] Monte Avila Editores, 2007. This book is not readily available outside Venezuela. However, its text is available online. Harnecker is director of the “Popular Participation in Public Management” program of the Centro Internacional Miranda, a Bolivarian research institute in Caracas.

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After Bali: Time for a Different Kind of Climate Politics

By Ian Angus

Ian Angus is the editor of Climate and Capitalism. He will be the keynote speaker at a conference organized by the University of British Columbia student environment centre on Saturday January 19. He will also participate in a panel on “After Bali: Can Global Warming Be Stopped?” organized by the Vancouver Socialist Forum on Sunday January 20.

“We are ending up with something so watered down there was no need for 12,000 people to gather here in Bali to have a watered-down text. We could have done that by email.”

—*Dr. Angus Friday, Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States*

In a narrow and formal sense, last month’s Climate Change conference in Bali achieved its objectives. The Kyoto Protocol is due to expire in 2012: the Bali gathering’s purpose was to adopt a roadmap for negotiating a new treaty — and that was done. A new roadmap, called the Bali Action Plan, was adopted unanimously at an overtime session, after the USA withdrew its objections.

As the *New York Times* pointed out, the dramatic U.S. capitulation really didn’t amount to much: “From the United States the delegates got nothing, except a promise to participate in the forthcoming negotiations.” [1]

That’s why the Bali meetings were a failure in any meaningful sense. They didn’t even discuss the Kyoto Protocol’s failure to produce results, failed to recognize the need for rapid action, and above all failed to adopt (or even recommend) any targets for emission reductions. The final resolution might better be called the Bali *Inaction* Plan — at best it is an agreement to discuss further, and maybe agree in 2009 on measures that might be implemented after 2012.

As an observer from the Institute for Policy Studies writes:

“The Bali ‘action plan’ does almost nothing to ensure that the people most affected by the worst impacts of climate change will receive the resources needed to survive impending climate chaos. This transition plan for replacing the Kyoto Protocol, which is so far being called the “Bali mandate,” instead entrenches the power of big business, and the global financial institutions that work on its behalf, without committing any government to tangible emissions reductions.” [2]

Expanding CDM

The only concrete measure approved in Bali was a plan to take one of Kyoto’s worst features — the so-called Clean Development Mechanism — and make it worse. Under CDM, major polluters in the industrialized countries can avoid reducing emissions in their home countries by investing in “clean” projects in the Third World. Morally, this is bizarre — the modern equivalent of paying the medieval church to be forgiven for sins. Worse, the CDM process is

often corrupt, providing credits (and profits) for projects that don't reduce emissions, or that would have been carried out anyway.

The Bali delegates approved a World Bank plan to add deforestation to the list of CDM options. As Simone Lavera, the managing coordinator of Global Forest Coalition, points out:

“The World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility ... presents an easy way of pretending to be generous and contributing to tropical forest conservation ... [It] encourages potentially unwilling developing countries to include their forests in the international carbon market after 2012, providing donor countries with access to an abundance of cheap credits that help them avoid painful emission reductions in their own countries.” [3]

The World Bank deforestation plan will encourage the enclosure and privatization of forests, overriding indigenous land rights claims and calls for land reform. The indigenous and other poor people who live in and depend on the forests will be pushed out, so that Third World governments and forestry companies can sell credits representing trees that they promise not to cut down.

This plan is clearly another example of the practices condemned by Third World activists in the Durban Declaration of 2004, when they pointed out that CDM projects “appropriate land, water and air already supporting the lives and livelihoods of local communities for new carbon dumps for Northern industries.” [4]

Canada’s Role

No one familiar with the Harper government’s record will be surprised that Canada played a particularly appalling role in the Bali talks. Working closely with the USA and Japan, the Canadian delegation did its utmost to eliminate action from the Bali Action Plan. Ottawa’s alignment with the Bush crew reached absurd proportions: Environment Minister Baird even copied his Washington mentors by holding out to the last minute and then dramatically withdrawing his objections so that the vote could be unanimous.

The U.S.-Canada do-nothing position was counterposed to a policy that wasn’t much better. The European Union, which is less dependent on coal and oil than its North American competitors, initially proposed to mention (not decide on) emission targets at the low end of what scientists say is essential. They see such targets as a the royal road to windfall profits from carbon trading and clean development schemes. The poorest people and countries are pressured into making development choices determined not by their own needs, but by the desire of corporations in the north to avoid cutting emissions.

But when the U.S.-Canada-Japan axis objected, the EU quickly capitulated, replacing all mention of targets with a footnote reference to an IPCC document.

The Canadian Youth Climate Coalition sent a delegation of 21 young people to Bali, in the sincere belief that a strong and idealistic lobbying voice would make a difference. One student participant, using the web-name “jodafoe,” reported on the experience in the CYCC blog:

“I felt despair because of Canada’s climate change policy and the behaviour of its delegation, which served as a diplomatic wrecking ball to the process of international collective action. Minister Baird’s flippancy towards the issue was made clear to me when he refused to meet with the Canadian Youth Delegation, or appear at his own side-event to justify our national climate change plan, or when his press secretary told me that our petition of 60,000 signatures was insubstantial.

“I am not an expert of politics but my first foray into the field has been far from welcoming. If this is politics, I want nothing to do with it.” [5]

Needed: A Different Kind of Politics

Jodafoe is absolutely correct: if what happened in the conference rooms in Bali defines politics, then climate activists should have nothing to do with it.

But there is another kind of politics, and it too was represented in Bali — not in the official meetings, but in outside events and meetings that used the Bali event as an organizing opportunity and a springboard to action. There were many such activities, but two stand out as particularly important.

Climate Justice Now!

A meeting of 21 organizations that represent affected communities, indigenous peoples, women and peasant farmers, mainly from the Third World, agreed to create *Climate Justice Now!*, a coalition to improve communication and intensify actions to prevent and respond to climate change. Their initial statement concludes:

“Inside the negotiations, the rich industrialized countries have put unjustifiable pressure on Southern governments to commit to emissions’ reductions. At the same time, they have refused to live up to their own legal and moral obligations to radically cut emissions and support developing countries’ efforts to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts. Once again, the majority world is being forced to pay for the excesses of the minority.

“Compared to the outcomes of the official negotiations, the major success of Bali is the momentum that has been built towards creating a diverse, global movement for climate justice.

“We will take our struggle forward not just in the talks, but on the ground and in the streets — Climate Justice Now!” [6]

People’s Protocol on Climate Change

While the official meetings droned on, activists from Indonesia, the Philippines and Australia met elsewhere in Bali, in the town of Sumber Klampok, to draft a *People’s Protocol on Climate Change*, which they plan to use as a focus for worldwide organizing and discussion in the coming year, leading up to the next major UN meeting on climate change, in Poland in December.

The Draft People's Protocol says that the Kyoto Protocol has not merely failed to reduce emissions, it has "diminished responsibility and accountability for the climate crisis through the marketization of energy resources and supply."

"The Kyoto Protocol does not truly involve grassroots communities and peoples who are worst-affected, especially in the South. It has grossly neglected the severe damage to their livelihoods, well-being and welfare. It does not consistently and coherently adhere to the vital developmental principles, especially people's sovereignty over natural resources....

"Climate change must be understood not merely as an environmental issue but as a question of social justice; its causes are rooted in the current capitalist-dominated global economy which is principally driven by the relentless drive for private profits and accumulation."

The document includes a hard-hitting list of demands, and commits to "building on the powerful networks of movements for climate action that have emerged worldwide." [7]

We can't tell whether either of these projects will win broad support or play a key role in building a global climate action movement. What is clear is that *both point in the right direction, to a different kind of politics*: away from backroom lobbying, and toward the mobilization of mass sentiment and action against global warming.

Towards a Movement Against Climate Change

Canada has one of the worst records in the world for greenhouse gas emissions. That fact alone places special responsibility on activists in this country to confront our own government, to demand that it take immediate action to reduce emissions at home and to support climate justice for the countries and peoples who are most harmed by Canadian capitalist irresponsibility.

The beginnings of a broad movement against Canada's climate change policies can be seen in the wide variety of actions that have taken place across the country in the past year.

- Marches and rallies such as those held on December 8 in cities across Canada.
- Sit-ins and occupations like the Sharbot Lake action against uranium mining.
- Smaller "guerrilla theatre" actions designed to attract media coverage and expose particular abuses.
- Teach-ins and other educational events such as the sustainability conferences that are being held on several university campuses this winter.

It's much too early to say which forms of protest will prove most effective in building a movement. Our responsibility today is to participate wholeheartedly in actions as they develop, to provide concrete support, and to learn from the nascent movement's experiences.

Independent Action — For A People's Agenda

It's very like that there will be a federal election in 2008. Climate change activists will adopt different positions, some favoring abstention, others supporting the NDP, the Green Party, or

specific individual candidates. This will offer many opportunities for debate and discussion, opportunities that should be eagerly welcomed. Our stress throughout should be on the need to build an independent movement that demands concrete action from politicians and parties of all political stripes.

To confront politicians and policy makers effectively, the green movement needs to advance its own *People's Agenda on Climate Change*, a program that stresses both reducing emissions in Canada and advancing climate justice around the world. The specific details of such an agenda need to be worked out collaboratively by a wide range of activists, but the following are some of the demands we might raise.

- The experts in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have called for emission reductions of 25%-40% *below 1990 levels* by 2020, and 50%-85% by 2050. Regardless of what happens in international negotiations, Canada should *unilaterally* adopt and implement those targets.
- Emissions-trading plans and carbon-tax schemes are actually highly regressive taxes that mostly fall on poor people. Instead, Canada should impose hard limits on the emissions produced by the largest resource and energy companies.[8]
- As the Climate Justice Now Coalition points out, the only really effective way to cut emissions is to *leave fossil fuels in the ground*. In Canada this means immediately stopping all expansion of the tar sands – and then shutting them down quickly. Greenpeace has rightly called the tar sands the “biggest global warming crime in history.” Stopping that crime must be a priority.
- Military spending and the federal budget surplus should be immediately redirected into public energy-saving projects such as expanding mass transit and retrofitting homes and office buildings. Tar sands workers and redeployed soldiers can play key roles in this effort.
- Canada must recognize its ecological debt to the Third World and to indigenous peoples. Paying that debt means cleaning up the damage that Canada's capitalists have caused, providing concrete assistance in adapting to climate change, and transferring the resources and technology needed for clean economic development.

The Bali conference failed to adopt effective measures against climate change: a treaty based on the Bali decisions would be worse than Kyoto. But Bali may also be remembered as the beginning point for a revitalized global movement for climate action and climate justice.

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Socialist Voice #230, January 29, 2008

Venezuelan Socialists Discuss Program and Principles

by *Socialist Voice* editors

The founding congress of the newly organized United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) is now under way. A translation of the *PSUV's Draft Program and Declaration of Principles* has been posted on the website of the Australian-based journal *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal*.

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez called for the creation of a political instrument to unify the country's revolutionary forces in December, 2006. The founding congress, convened on January 12, 2008, involves some 1,676 congress delegates elected from almost 15,000 socialist battalions — local units of the PSUV. Over the next two months, they will discuss and debate the draft program, principles and statutes of the new party.

Between congress sessions, delegates will return to their local regions and battalions to ensure the widest possible discussion of these documents among the ranks of the new party.

The draft program and principles are important documents, not just for the Venezuelan left, but for progressive and revolutionary forces worldwide. We encourage *Socialist Voice* readers to study them carefully.

Also available now on the *Links* website:

- **Pakistan Collapsing, Musharraf Must Go**

By Farooq Tariq, General Secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan

Pakistan is on the fast track to collapse under the Pervez Musharraf dictatorship. The state is in profound crisis. The infrastructure, industrial and social, is in total chaos as an economic crisis deepens.

- **Indianismo and Marxism: The Mismatch of Two Revolutionary Rationales**

by Álvaro García Linera, Vice-President of Bolivia

Translated, with an Introduction, by Richard Fidler

This important article traces the contradictory evolution of the two most influential revolutionary currents in Bolivia's 20th century history and argues that Marxism, as originally interpreted by its Bolivian adherents, failed to address the outstanding concerns of the Indigenous majority. García Linera suggests, however, that the evolution of indianismo in recent decades opens perspectives for a renewal of Marxist thought and potentially the reconciliation of the two currents in a higher synthesis.

About *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal*

From the *Links* website:

“Links is a journal for the post Cold War left; a journal that rejects the Stalinist distortion of the socialist project; a journal that takes into account ecological questions; a journal

that is taking steps to unify and bring together the forces for socialism in the world today; a journal that aspires to unite Marxists from different political traditions because it discusses openly and constructively.”

“Inspired by the unfolding socialist revolution in Venezuela, led by Hugo Chavez, *Links* is also a journal for ‘Socialism in the 21st Century’ and the discussions and debates that are flowing from that powerful example of socialist renewal.”

The editorial advisory board of *Links* includes Peter Boyle, Lisa Macdonald, John Percy and Terry Townsend (Australia), John Riddell (Canada), Dita Sari (Indonesia), Farooq Tariq (Pakistan), Sonny Melencio (Philippines), Murray Smith (Scotland), and Malik Miah (United States).

Links recently changed from a printed journal to a web-based project that seeks to promote the international exchange of information, experience of struggle, theoretical analysis and views of political strategy and tactics within the international left.

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