

FIRE THIS TIME



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FREE

Imperialist Crisis in Iraq Deepens

By Mike Krebs

'Putting more soldiers on the ground is not going to solve the problem when I don't have the intelligence to act on it.' – Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, commander of American Military Forces in Baghdad

This statement reveals the core source of the problem that the US is facing in consolidating and sustaining its brutal occupation of Iraq. It means that the US, the UK and other countries with troops in Iraq are dealing with a concerted guerrilla warfare, with sustained resistance to the occupation, despite having over 160,000 troops in the country. Despite the vast superiority of the US military machine in terms of size, training, funding, intelligence, and most importantly, a long history of imperialist intervention, the US has been unable to secure Iraq for the purposes of plundering the wealth of the country and its people. It has not succeeded in putting itself in a better position against its imperialist rivals, and, because of the problems it is facing, now must decide how many concessions it is willing to give to its imperialist rivals, primarily France and Germany, in the form of some type of official UN involvement.

The guerrilla warfare in Iraq, which is being waged against virtually anybody that is carrying out or providing support for the occupation, is one of the most important



March against the occupations of Iraq and Palestine in Barcelona, September 27th 2003. From September 25th to 28th, hundreds of thousands of people around the world took to the streets to take part in an international call against imperialist war and occupation, with a specific focus on the occupations of Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan. In Vancouver, over 2000 people rallied against war and occupation on September 28th.

problems that the US is currently facing. However, the US is facing many other complications, problems, and pitfalls on several fronts, and is quickly sinking deeper into a trap from which it has so far been unable to find a way out.

Problems at Home

'There is no strategy or mechanism for putting the pieces together. We're in danger

of failing.' – Retired Marine Gen. Anthony C. Zinni

While Anthony Zinni is correct about the lack of strategy for the occupation of Iraq, in terms of the danger of failing he's a little behind: the failures of US plans have clearly already begun.

Since the August 19th bombing of the UN office in Baghdad and the August 29th

bombing of the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf, the US ruling class has been desperately trying to seek a solution to the problem it is facing in Iraq, with the US administration facing increasing criticism even from within its own ranks. For example, a recently released report prepared for the US military Joint Chiefs of Staff blames post-war unrest in Iraq on hurried, inadequate planning before the invasion.

There has also been debate about the level of troops and resources in the region. While some US military analysts suggest that over 400,000 troops are needed, and preferably US ones, officially the US administration is not considering sending more US forces at this time.

This of course has a lot to do with the increasing worry at home about sending more US troops to Iraq when the death toll is steadily increasing. As of October 1st, there were over 176 US casualties in Iraq since the May 1st 'end of the war' declaration, which is more than the total number of casualties suffered during the invasion and occupation.

Aside from this growing concern, the US is also reaching material limitations over how large of a military presence it can maintain in Iraq. The US Congressional Budget Office warned on September 2nd that the demands of troop rotations around the world could

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Poverty for Profit: The BC Liberal Attacks on Welfare, Housing and Disability

By Ivan Drury

'We have no intention of reducing welfare rates.'

- Gordon Campbell, 2001 election campaign

While the Liberals themselves do not forecast unemployment rates to fall

below 7.2% before 2007, they do forecast consistently falling welfare rolls through these same years. While welfare rolls shrank 14.5% from June of 2002 to June of this year, unemployment grew 16.3% higher in that same term.

On September 10th, the Ministry of Human Resources released an 'Exit Survey' of those who left assistance in the past year. The results of the survey are questionable as only 36% of those who left assistance were contacted for the survey. Thirty-eight percent of those who left assistance no longer had telephones, a sign of their financial state without welfare. Eighty-three percent of those who were contacted who left welfare for work had secured employment in the service sector. The average earnings rate for single parent families contacted who had left welfare for work was \$1,517 a month; \$4,720 below the poverty line estimated in 2000 for single parent families in urban centres.*

Cut off: Kicking the unemployed off welfare

'We placed time limits on income

assistance to discourage employable people from turning welfare into a way of life.' - Murray Coell, Minister of Human Resources

Since January of 2002, the BC Liberals have implemented changes that keep people off welfare, make living on welfare more difficult and push people off assistance. Applicants must now wait three weeks from the submission of their application until their first interview with an Economic Assistance Worker (EAW). This three-week wait is meant to ensure that applicants exhaust all possible options before receiving welfare. People who have received an eviction notice are generally not told that they are able to receive an exemption from the wait from EAWs who are penalized for perceived leniency with clients. These people often get evicted and then miss their appointment because of the chaos that comes with homelessness.

Once on welfare, the Ministry of Human Resources (MHR) has become so uncomfortable to live under that many people are settling for even the most insubstantial, exploitative employment. All earnings exemptions have been eliminated for people on regular assistance. If a client of MHR makes even \$50 on the side, it



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is deducted, dollar for dollar from their cheque. If earnings are not reported, the client can be charged criminally and cut off from welfare for any period of time, even up to a lifetime ban.

On top of these changes is the elimination of back to work allowances for people trying to re-enter the workforce and the elimination of childcare subsidies for

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Crisis on Iraq

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leave the Defense Department without fresh army units for Iraq for next year unless tours of duty stretch beyond a year.

In terms of cost, the US is having a harder and harder time affording the occupation, as well as a harder time gaining domestic support for this spending. The US is facing a bill of roughly \$4 billion a month in military expenses for the occupation. In addition to other costs, such as an estimated \$8 billion in Iraqi government salaries and \$7 billion for repairs to public utilities and vital services, the current American and UN estimates are that the total bill of the occupation and 'reconstruction' of Iraq (including military and rebuilding costs) will be more than \$500 billion.

Even the use of Iraq's own oil wealth will not mean that the occupation will 'pay for itself.' Donald Hepburn, former Chief Executive of the Bahrain Petroleum Company, estimates that with the immense costs rebuilding Iraq's pipelines, which have been heavily aggravated due to the near-daily sabotage of facilities and pipelines, at best oil revenues will rise 'only slowly over the next three years, from approximately \$10 billion in 2004 to \$20 billion in 2006.

Problems with the UK

As for the US's chief partner in the occupation, the UK, the Blair administration is facing many of the same problems as the US in terms of being able to maintain political support for the occupation, both from voices opposed to the war and within the UK ruling class. On September 6th, the UK Shadow Defense Secretary Bernard Jenkin said that the government's handling of post-war Iraq was a 'complete shambles.' Blair and his government are also being especially hard-hit with the scandal around the Dossier report on Iraq's nowhere-to-be-found weapons of mass destruction, and what is often now referred to in the British press as the 'apparent' suicide of Dr. David Kelly.

The annual conference of British Labour Party during the first week of October saw more friction within the UK ruling class on the situation in Iraq, as Blair came under fire from many delegates for the current crisis created in Iraq by the US-UK invasion.

Despite this, Jack Straw, the UK Foreign Secretary, called for an extra 5,000 troops. In the meantime, Britain has ordered a review of its troop numbers in Iraq.

With this series of problems and failures faced by both the US and UK in their occupation of Iraq, they had no choice but to seek assistance from other countries, in the form of political support, troops, and finances.

Problems with seeking 'help' elsewhere

'Most foreign troops will also bring a political agenda with them [and] demands for a role in nation building decisions.' – Anthony H. Cordesman, Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank, August 25 2003

The main place that the US is now turning to for support is the other imperialist countries that 'opposed' the war, with Donald Rumsfeld requesting another 10,000 foreign troops. The US, unable to sustain the occupation on its own, is pushing for a UN resolution that will establish a multinational force under the auspices of the UN with a US commander. Collin Powell presented the first draft of this new resolution to the UN Security Council on September 3rd.

First legal Safe-injection Site opens in Vancouver

By Shannon Bundock

On Monday Sept 22nd, 2003, at 139 E. Hastings Vancouver, the first federally funded, legal safe-injection site in North America opened up to drug users. The site provides clean equipment – rigs, sterile water, tourniquets – and nursing staff on hand. Although a lone injection site in a city with many thousands of drug users is an incomplete solution to the problems that result from the criminalization of drug use, it is still a positive step forward. The safe-injection site not only has the immediate effect of preventing overdose deaths, disease and infection, it also works towards a progressive approach to drug addiction that challenges the fundamental problems of the illegalization of drugs.

The intense demand for this site, and others like it in all major cities across the country, is a result of the deepening crisis that we now see for drug users. This crisis is a result of the increased attacks on marginalized people nationally through attacks by neo-liberal governments; in BC, a result of the anti-poor, anti-working class agenda of Gordon Campbell's Liberal government. While all poor and working people face assaults through cuts to welfare, attacks on union collective agreements, increased Medical Service Premiums, shutting down of the Ministry of Women's Equality etc., attacks are hardest on the most marginalized sectors of society, which includes drug users.

In addition, according to a study done

by Human Rights Watch (HRW is an independent organization in the US), the increase in police presence through "Operation Torpedo" resulted in increased repression through arbitrary arrests and detention. HRW goes on to say that this has created an extreme climate of fear and oppression which led to a reduction in the number of users that feel safe accessing needed services.

Thomas Kerr of the HIV/AIDS Legal Network has raised concerns about rigid rules and police presence deterring drug users from accessing the site. As well, a recent study showed that 92% of Vancouver's drug users initially said that they'd use the site, but after they became aware of the bureaucratic complexities that they'd be faced with, the number dropped to 31%.

Now there are a number of questions that the opening of the site poses, one major question being: *is this adequate and is this enough?* Of course the reality remains that if this site had existed in earlier many thousand lives could have been saved, but given the number of obstacles that drug users face on top of needing safe and clean fixing sites, a larger strategy is obviously necessary.

The site is being presented as a very radical and progressive response to the drug problems in the Downtown Eastside; however, in order to truly address the problems with drug use in the DTES, one must examine the issue within the context of all poor and working people in Vancouver. In order for the Downtown Eastside to develop

into a healthy, community-controlled region, there must be an emphasis on improving the lives of all poor and working people; for example, through free clinics and access to dignified housing. We must recognize that the overt attacks that face drug users are part of the same agenda that attacks all poor and working people in BC.

As working and poor people we must support the safe injection site on the basis that it is one step towards improving the position of drug users, who are an extremely marginalized layer of the working class. In order to truly support the site on this basis we must address the foundations of the problem, as the site cannot be successful if other wings and levels of government are implementing measures that work to impoverish and deny the rights of drug users.

Opening of the legal safe injection site must be analyzed in the context of the overall approach that all levels of government are taking to the DTES. To truly address the crisis as poor and working people we must demand that the attacks on drug users stop immediately, that every measure is taken to provide essential services. Beyond the safe injection site, we must demand full access to detox and heroin maintenance programs and further, we must demand the legalization of all drugs for the end to criminalization of drug users in order to improve the position of the most attacked layers of the working class, for the ultimate benefit of all poor and marginalized people.

This resolution is simply calling for a UN cover for what would be nothing more than a continuation of the same colonial occupation, except that the US is seeking involvement of other imperialist powers in the plundering of Iraq's wealth. The main problem is, because of the rivalries between these countries, the US is unwilling to give enough concessions to please Germany and France, who opposed the initial draft. Collin Powell announced on September 30th that a second draft of the resolution was now being put together, which would be ready to be presented to the Security Council during the first week of October.

With this resolution being discussed in the Security Council, the same type of negotiations between these imperialist powers that occurred before the war have now resumed. The US is battling with France and Germany, as well as with Russia and other less powerful countries, over the sharing of political influence and lucrative contracts for the reconstruction of Iraq and its oil potential. To date, the US is not willing, or able, to give France and Germany the concessions they seek, and for Collin Powell, it is a given that the UN 'multilateral' force would be controlled by the US: 'With a [military] force this size, and the majority of that force coming from one country, that country is the provider of the commander.'

These same types of discussions between the different imperialist countries over the Iraq situation will continue on October 23rd in Spain, where the US, the European Union, Japan, the World Bank and the United Nations are making plans for a donors conference to induce countries to contribute to the rebuilding effort. But, as a New York Times editorial from September 4th puts it, 'Europe's willingness to share these costs will flow in proportion to Washington's willingness to share responsibility.'

There is another factor that any country that is involved or wants to be involved in the occupation of Iraq must face, and that

is the sustained and growing resistance that the Iraqi people have waged against the brutal occupation of their country. This factor underpins virtually every problem that the occupiers face in terms of the human and financial cost of sustaining the occupation, whether it is the US, Britain, Russia, France, Germany, Poland, Turkey, India, or any other country that provides troops or financial support for the pillaging of Iraq.

The US plans to set up an Iraqi militia to help share the burden of policing Iraq, which US officials announced on September 1st will meet similar problems, as it is clear that any force supporting or participating in the occupation is a potential target for the Iraqi resistance.

Problems with continued Iraqi Resistance

The chaos, misery, starvation, and poverty for the Iraqi people has only gotten worse since the occupation of their country. A lack of basic infrastructure, mass unemployment, and the shattering of even basic government institutions has taken a devastating toll on Iraqis, and this has only strengthened sentiment against the US, against the UK, against the occupation, and against imperialism. As a result of the occupation, this sentiment has also grown elsewhere all around the world, in the Middle East and in the third world especially, as the true human cost of the imperialists' plans for future war and occupation becomes even clearer. This marks another failure for the US, who had intended

to change the relationship of forces in the Middle East in their favour, and are now seeing the sentiment against imperialism only deepened by the occupation of Iraq.

The Iraqi resistance to the occupation has only increased since the May 1st announcement by US president Bush that the major operations in Iraq were 'over.' The almost daily individual attacks on the occupying troops continue, and there has been a change in the targets being picked by those who are resisting the occupation in Iraq. An August 20th article released by Stratfor, a conservative American think tank, reports that 'since

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Venezuela: A Step Forward for Latin America

By Shannon Bundock

The history of oppressed people in Latin America, like the history of all oppressed people globally, is one of struggle for liberation. The political situation in Venezuela provides an example of a higher stage of that struggle; a progressive and revolutionary example for all of Latin America and beyond. For us to understand and learn from the political developments in Venezuela we must go back a little into the recent political history of Venezuela.

In 1982, in response to the escalating class divisions and exploitation at the hands of the government and capitalist ruling class, the Bolivar Revolutionary Movement (MBR) was formed, with Hugo Chavez Frias as a leader. In 1989 there was a popular uprising of poor and working people in response to a major hike in bus fares, which were a result of structural changes imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This uprising, the 'Caracazo,' was put down by President Carlos Andres Perez, leaving 4,000 people dead. The Caracazo was an important part of mobilizing oppressed people and setting a basis for the revolutionary process that is continuing today.

In 1998, after two coup attempts by MBR, Hugo Chavez created the Movimiento Quinta Republica to run for presidential election. He won with a landslide majority vote of 56.2% and, for the first time in 40 years, broke the two-party rule that had existed in Venezuela.



Venezuelans rally in support of Hugo Chavez during the attempted coup against his government, April 2002

Chavez won the confidence of the people of Venezuela and provided a leadership that gave poor and working people the space to create a new path for the anti-imperialist movement in Venezuela.

However, winning the election did not prove to be the ultimate victory, as Venezuela still held within its borders a powerful capitalist and reactionary opposition to Chavez. For five years Venezuela has struggled against the capitalist class, business leaders and US imperialists, even suffering a coup that overturned the Chavez government for forty-eight hours in April 2002. In order to fight in solidarity with the people of Venezuela we must examine the past five years and have an

understanding of the struggle that has been undertaken to push Venezuela forward – both as an international struggle for liberation from US dominance and as an internal struggle for the lives and dignity of all poor, working and oppressed Venezuelans.

The Progressive Path of the Fifth Republica

The past five years have seen incredible changes in favour of the oppressed people of Venezuela. In 1998, the Chavez government drafted, and passed by referendum, a new progressive constitution for the country, which saw it renamed as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, after national hero Simon Bolivar. As well, legislation was created

through forty-nine progressive new laws, which, among many other measures, aimed at redistributing land and increasing the government's oil production to sustain the social programs.

Under Chavez more policies have been directed at improving the position of the poor majority. As part of a deal to supply oil to Cuba, Venezuela has imported hundreds of Cuban doctors to work for free in the hillside shanty towns surrounding Caracas. Thousands of illiterate adults are getting free reading and writing classes using methods developed in Cuba. The government has also handed out land titles to rural peasants and some urban squatters. Indigenous people have gained unprecedented constitutional rights, including the right to own their own land.

Some of the most major changes that the Chavez government has implemented have been in regards to the country's state-owned oil company, PDVSA. The appointment of a prominent leftist economist and long-time critic of the company to presidency along with a pro-government board of directors led to an outcry from PDVSA management, arguing that the appointments were purely political. Chavez countered that the appointments to PDVSA had always been political and that the state needed to regain control of the company as it was increasingly inefficient and with top management living in extreme luxury.

In the interest of self-preservation, the reactionary, right-wing opposition has challenged these progressive steps forward at every turn. In regards to the process that is under attack, Leonel Vivas, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's ambassador to Australia, said in a speech on August 2nd 2003:

'They [the capitalist class] want to reinstate the past, with its social exclusion, and violation of people's rights. They are trying to overturn the social works carried out by the Bolivarian revolutionary process: 150,000 houses built during the last two years; 3000 schools opened, in which one million children receive quality education and adequate food; the university budget tripled; salary increases for teachers and professors; free treatment for all patients

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Brazil: A Step Backward For Latin America

By Nasim Sedaghat
and Ali Yerevani

On October 27th, 2002, after decades of instability and different military and right-wing governments in Brazil, Luiz Inacio 'Lula' de Silva, the central leader of the Worker's Party (PT) and a former trade unionist and metal worker, won the second round of presidential elections by a 61.5% landslide. Lula, a man from the working class who worked from age twelve, came to power with a hope for millions of poor and working people for a fundamental change that is needed for Brazil to come out of decades of severe poverty and bankruptcy to bring about a better life for a country where foreign debt and poverty are the main features.

Poverty

Brazil has the world's ninth largest economy; yet an estimated 53 million people, almost one-

third of the population of 182 million, live below the poverty line. Land ownership in Brazil is among the most unequal in the world, with 20% of the population owning 90% of the land. Then the poorest 40% own just one percent of the land. The unemployment rate now stands at 8%, up from 6% in eight years. The wealthiest one percent of Brazilians account for a greater share of the national income than the bottom 50%.

Unfortunately, since Lula, who is a leftist trade unionist, took office he has completely turned his back to the same working people who elected him to the presidency. During his election Lula promised to create one million jobs, double the minimum wage and tackle poverty in favour of social equality and, as he said once 'Zero hunger,' to feed the poor three times a day. But instead he carried out a massive austerity program in the interests of corporations and foreign creditors like the World Bank and



Brazilians celebrate the election of Luiz Inacio 'Lula' de Silva, October 2002.

the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Brazil's foreign debt is already \$260 billion, and many economists and experts admit that with the rate of economic growth, for Brazil to pay back not only

the debt but also even the interest of the debt is unsustainable. In order to ensure the foreign investors and the IMF that the Brazilian economy is stable and sustainable, one of his first

attacks on working people was to cut \$14 million in spending on social programs—cuts which he described as 'bitter medicine'

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Lula implements austerity measures on the people of Brazil

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that is necessary for the health of the economy.

Austerity Measures

Although Lula's government introduced limited progressive measures in some sectors of the government, workers and poor people, these measures have indeed had only a tokenistic effect overall on Brazil's ill economy in comparison with the growth rate of inflation and a very large economy that suffers from stagnation. Since March 2003, hundreds of thousands of industrial and service workers, as well as peasants and landless workers, demonstrated their dissatisfaction and disagreement with Lula's austerity and pro-international corporation program on the streets of Brazil. In March the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST), which was one of the main supporters of Lula in last October's election, declared that they were ending the moratorium on taking over the land. It has been reported that the landless workers in at least

five states resumed to occupy state and private owned lands and properties. The MST was formed in 1985 to organize landless rural workers to defend their right to land. While the richest 20% of the population own 90% of the land in Brazil, there are twelve million landless peasants and rural workers. MST uses both the direct action methods for occupying land and property and at the same times works closely with Lula's government. For instance, they are working jointly with the government to speed the elaboration and implementation of a National Land Reform Plan to benefit the settlement of one million families for the period of 2003 to 2006 in rural areas.

What Next?

Lula, whose government is getting to one year of ruling Brazil, already has been challenged by tremendous problems, part of which are policies inherited from previous capitalist governments who, with huge borrowing from IMF and World Bank, had brought bankruptcy to Brazil. However, one could not forget



March organized by the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) against the continuing political persecution of their movement.

that Lula in one year of governing hasn't been able to offer anything really better than previous governments have. The economy, standard of living and lives of the working and poor people continued deteriorating. Many

unions and workers' associations have started to consider a general strike and resistance. The course of events showed clearly that Lula, who came to power with the leftist rhetoric, has been truly unsuccessful with using the

capitalist method to tackle the problems that are basically rooted in the world that itself is suffering from stagnation, low-level productivity, and market crises.



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

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suffering from AIDS; more than 3000 Venezuelans given medical treatment in Cuba, free of charge; water supply systems built to provide fresh water to two million Venezuelans for the first time in their lives; benefits given to thousands of farmers; and the decision not to privatize the power, aluminum, water and oil industries, something that was attempted by the neoliberals in the past and is the aim of the coup plotters today.'

The Reactionary Opposition Attacks

Political changes in Venezuela, coupled with the creation of many pro-government community organizing groups, the Bolivarian Circles, which focus on political education and local issues, have together challenged the entire capitalist ruling class, beyond political opponents and business leaders. The extreme anti-Chavez opposition – which is made up of the petroleum oligarchy, the employers' federation Fedecameras, big entrepreneurs, owners of private media, bureaucrats of corrupt pro-management unions, traitorous military chiefs and representatives of Venezuela's political past – has responded strongly to Chavez's reforms. In order to defend their class position and their corporate interests at all costs they began a major attack on Chavez with US help and money. The fight for control of Venezuela

Attacks on Chavez government continue

has extended beyond the country, with US imperialism backing the anti-Chavez opposition forces.

In April 2002 the reactionary opposition forces in Venezuela called for massive demonstrations against the government, and when Chavez supporters convened at the presidential palace, the anti-Chavez leaders directed their rally to march on the palace, which led to a massive confrontation. During the crisis, the opposition leaders took control of the palace, kidnapped Chavez, falsely broadcast on opposition-controlled private media that Chavez had resigned and drove the democratically elected government out of power. Within twenty-four hours the coup leaders had sworn in Fedecameras' head Pedro Carmona as president, and he proceeded to dissolve the national assembly, throw out the constitution, repeal forty-nine laws and arrest many democratically elected mayors and governors. On April 13th, the people of Venezuela took action. Massive demonstrations converged on the palace and along with the loyalist rank-and-file of the military, the coup leaders were captured and arrested. Within forty-eight hours Chavez and his ministers were brought back to power and the coup was defeated.

This event was a major defeat for the reactionary opposition as it increased the confidence of working people and led to development in political consciousness of the people in understanding their interest as opposed to that of capitalists and imperialists. It led to a divide in the opposition and more clearly exposed the existing divisions in the church and military.

Private television networks and other media have been an important element of the opposition. Their owners, Gustavo Cisneros, Marcel Granier and Alberto Federico Ravel, who used to be the puppeteers of Venezuela's governments of yesterday, attack the Chavez government constantly. The private media call for disobedience, attempt to spread fear about

the relations between Cuba and Venezuela, and broadcast appeals and instructions from coup ringleaders. The goal of the reactionary opposition with the help and finance of the US is to create mass chaos and to demoralize masses of poor and working people and do everything possible in order to oust President Chavez and overthrow his government.

Challenging US Imperialism

Since the election five years ago, Venezuela's advance along a path of radical and progressive change has been a major threat to US political hegemony in Latin America. Venezuela is in a strategic region for the United States and on top of needing to control the region politically, the US government also has great economic interest in the country. Venezuela is the world's fifth highest oil-producing nation and unquestionably the election of Chavez greatly impacted the US in an immediate sense trade-wise. According to the US Department of Energy, in 1996 and 1997 Venezuela was the number one exporter of oil to the US and since 1992 Venezuela has consistently ranked in the top three for oil imports to US.

The Chavez government has challenged the US's current long-term war of direct political and military intervention and domination of Latin America. While struggles heat up in Colombia, the last thing the US wants is a strong, independent Latin American nation weakening US domination. Fighting for self-determination and walking a revolutionary path will show a possible alternative for other nations across the continent. As a result the US has attempted to discredit and criminalize Venezuela with lies of their relationship to the militant Colombian organization FARC and the Cuban government.

However, despite attacks Chavez continues to push Latin America to follow the lead of Venezuela and other progressive nations, such as Cuba, in relation to foreign policy. Currently Chavez is criticizing the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA)

and promoting an alternative for Latin America called the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) which hits on the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) disastrous effect on regional development.

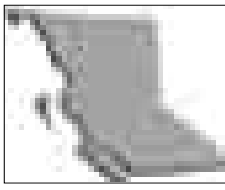
Moving Forward

This past August saw a major celebration in the streets of Caracas, Venezuela, of the mid-way mark of Chavez's term that began with the 2000 election. Anywhere from one to three million people were out on the streets listening to Chavez speaking about the accomplishments of the Bolivarian Republic and the road forward.

'I'm celebrating these three years of government. Chavez is a good man and he's helping us poor people—and the poor are the majority,' said Dilia Martinez, 43, who rode a bus for ten hours from the state of Monagas to join the gathering.

Steps have been taken to organize a new trade union confederation to replace the corrupt CTV. This initiative has been supported by a number of different groups and tendencies in the country including many rank-and-file members of the CTV. This new confederation has the potential to play an important role in the establishment of a new direction for the trade union movement in Venezuela. In addition, the people of Venezuela are engaging in a widespread campaign to defeat illiteracy, similar to the successful campaign taken on in Cuba years ago. Organizing at all levels remains essential to the survival of the Chavez government, as the opposition, although a minority, still has power and still controls the private media.

As Chavez consolidates his supporters continually along the way and as Venezuela moves forward, all poor and working people across the globe must work in solidarity to defend the sovereignty of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, demand US hands off Venezuela and support the great gains achieved by the Chavez government and Venezuelan working and poor people.



A Single Mother Against the Liberal Government: An Interview with Myriam Hernandez

By Shannon Bundock

Myriam Hernandez is a single mother living in Vancouver. She is originally from Mexico and came to Canada as a refugee. Like many people throughout the province, Miriam is facing the effects of the Liberals' cutbacks on many different levels.

We spoke to Myriam this September in order to get a first-hand account of how the Liberal government is impacting the lives of single mothers in British Columbia.

The BC Liberal government has been attacking women on many different levels since the beginning of their term in 2001. Through cuts to welfare, healthcare, access to childcare, etc. almost no woman has been left unaffected by the cutbacks. What have you found to be the most significant changes that have affected your life as a single mother?

The major thing is that there are no jobs available - no training - no options. People have to do illegal activities in order to survive. And they [the government] don't care. They don't give you opportunities to find a better life; they want you put down, forever.

And school is for rich people. My course, one course, is \$825

dollars. For someone on social assistance, imagine how long to save for one course. I saved for 8 months. With the cutbacks you are always worried about your future, about your family, about your kids.

Cuts to healthcare mean that your health problems become bigger, and if you need a specialist you can't go, you have to pay. There is a long list of cuts.

People start to get angry with everyone.

Under the Liberals' many people were facing compounded attacks. As a single mother, who is also a student, how have you been affected by reductions in women's services on top of increases in tuition?

When I was in this TAB [Training Assistance Benefits] program, through welfare, for example, I was a part time student and I had access to after school child care. Single mothers, we had access to childcare - to after-school programs. Now we don't have that.

I know women, poor women who have to work or spend twelve hours every day for transportation, for part-time jobs or volunteer work. But, even if you are trying to gain experience by doing volunteer work, welfare

doesn't care about your situation and they cut even the little money [stipends] people get from volunteer work. These women need that money. Before you could ask for help for furniture, for example. Now they cut that, they [welfare] no longer help anyone.

Also, there is reduced support for rent through social assistance. Fortunately I am in a housing co-op and that's where I'm safe from the problem, but think of how many people live in market rent apartments.



March against the BC Liberals' agenda, March 2002

As an immigrant woman of colour, how have you seen the Liberal government's attacks on women affecting immigrant and refugee women in BC?

When on welfare, immigrants and people who don't speak English

had access to "TAB" [Training Assistance Benefits], a program that allowed them to study English as a Second Language [ESL]. This program was for all kinds of people who needed English to find work and get off of assistance.

When I was in this program my plan was to finish ESL and then go to Langara College to be a social worker, as that is what I did in Mexico, for many years. I wanted to do this to prepare for a job. But with the cuts we cannot access this program.

Now even the community centers don't have ESL programs. They don't have support for immigration, they don't have many programs at all. They don't even have proper access to recreation.

But, the cuts are not just from the provincial government, also the federal government, and that affects immigrants double. Refugees have no access to lawyers, and immediately welfare tells them to find a job. And how can someone, without English, without adaptation, go out and find a job? That provokes a big crisis.

Any closing comments?

The question is: How do people organize to defend their rights? And it's hard; it's hard work.

People have to be conscious about the cuts in order to fight for their rights. People can see how they have to change things.

We need to spread the message that people need to do something. People need to react, people need to do something. On the buses, in the schools we need to talk to people.

People will start to change as they see the cuts affecting their lives. People will stand up and say this is not fair and do something. We need more mobilization, more people to speak out. It is not necessary to wait for elections, the elections provide no options and we will have the same problems. What we need is a new leadership with new people to do education and help people mobilize.

The Liberals and Women: Maintaining Second-class Status

By Shannon Bundock

Since the election of the Liberal government in BC in spring of 2001 there have been unprecedented campaigns waged against all poor, working and oppressed people in the province. One of the most major offensives which has been undertaken is the campaign against women's services. In fact, the cutbacks have been so brutal that the Liberal government has even received international criticism from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Women have been under attack from all sides since 2001, both directly through cuts to women's programs, and through cuts to, for example, childcare, legal aid, welfare and healthcare -- cuts which are disproportionately affecting women.

In the CEDAW questioning of Canada, the UN found poverty rates of 54% for single mothers, 43% for Aboriginal women, 37% for women of colour, and 48% for women who are recent immigrants. Committee members were also concerned that cuts to social programs have deepened women's social and economic vulnerability, eliminating their good jobs, increasing their burden of unpaid work,

and making them less able to leave abusive relationships.

As well, poverty among women in BC is becoming further entrenched as the Liberal government has reduced their contribution to the BC Family Bonus. In addition, mothers on welfare must now find paid work once their youngest child has turned three years old, reduced down from seven years old. Welfare recipients are no longer allowed the Family Maintenance exemption, which formerly permitted those receiving child support payments to keep \$100 per month.

Rising rates of poverty among women, coupled with lack of services, has further limited the independence of women and has tied them even more firmly into traditional family relationships in order to survive economically.

The majority of Liberal cutbacks have had a disproportionately negative impact on women and girls, including the cuts in funds for legal aid and welfare assistance; narrowed eligibility rules for welfare; the abolition of the independent Human Rights Commission; the closing of a number of courthouses; the cut in support programs for victims of domestic violence and the proposed changes regarding the

prosecution of domestic violence.

Single mothers, over half of whom live below the poverty line, are being targeted extremely severely through cuts to childcare access through the cancellation of universal childcare and elimination of before- and after-school care programs. In addition, over three years, \$360 million in funding has been cut from the Ministry of Children and Families which has meant cuts to childcare subsidies, social workers, etc.

At the same time that these steps are being taken backwards the Liberal Government has dismantled the Ministry for Women's Equality, with Minister Lynn Stephens denying that gender inequality exists; claiming that 'a single man and a single woman have exactly the same opportunities, with the same education,' and that women are 'abused not oppressed.'

The attacks are continuing with the announcement of the upcoming closure of thirty-seven women's centers across the province. In June 2003, in a meeting with Lynn Stephens, the BC Coalition of Women's Centers was told: 'A lot of the difficulty seems to be that they (women's centres) do not want to lose the feminist-

based service delivery model. They don't want to move to the more mainstream service delivery model, so there are problems.'

The attack on women's centers can be seen as an obvious attack on a service that works to improve the position of women in BC. Unfortunately, for the BC Liberal government, successfully improving the position of women would have negative results as it would lead to challenging the foundations of the gender division, and subsequently unpaid women's work, that capitalism so strongly needs in order to survive.

What we are seeing with the BC Liberal government, in fact, is that they are playing a leading role in maintaining the oppression of women by denying our independent economic survival and by ensuring that we remain in situations that require we take on unpaid labour and subservient roles. All poor and working people in BC must see the attacks on women as attacks on all oppressed people. In order to improve the position of all working people, we must also improve the position of women. Fighting the BC Liberal government in defense of women is a fight in defense of the people of British Columbia.

Shelter, Hope and the Fight for Dignity: An Interview with Minister George Feenstra

By Ivan Drury

A small church with a big spirit hidden in a residential part of Mount Pleasant recently made news headlines for opening its doors to sex trade workers, drug users and homeless people. A small number of people in the neighbourhood reacted with anger and threats of violence. The actions of the minister of Grace Memorial Church, George Feenstra, a well known priest-activist for poor and oppressed people, has brought much joy and support to people whose needs and lives have been abandoned by the BC Liberal government. However, these actions have also polarized the community between people who want to see their investments in business and real estate pay off and poor and working people and their supporters who want the neighbourhood to remain home.

There is a history of aggressive gentrification in Mount Pleasant that has been carried out through the violent ousting of prostitutes. At a 1998 public meeting advising residents at Hastings and Victoria Drive on how to 'deal' with prostitution, a Mount Pleasant resident re-counted this revolt: 'All the political action and bylaws and zoning and police action couldn't accomplish what was done with a few punches.' The meeting was told that their neighbourhood too would become 'like heaven' if they would just 'beat the stuffing out of a couple of pimps.'

In 2000, the Dickens Community Crime Watch Group organized foot patrols and co-ordinated efforts with city council and the police to drive 'undesirables' out of the neighbourhood. Police claim that this has led to an 80% drop in visible drug trafficking and prostitution in the area. The Livingston Area Neighbourhood Improvement Group recognizes that the cleansing of prostitutes, homeless and the poor from their neighbourhoods does not solve any problems: 'A vast majority of us agree that a red light district is needed in the city somewhere. But everybody has the same problem: not in my backyard.' (Vancouver Courier) The so-called 80% decline in 'undesirables' does not mark a decline in poverty, desperation or suffering but is part of a cyclical crisis created by this delusional 'not in my backyard' syndrome that displaces people continuously throughout different neighbourhoods and introduces new levels of human desperation with every move.

The same 'neighbourhood' and 'community' groups that chase homeless people and prostitutes into industrial areas to be preyed upon by serial killers and 'bad dates' are threatened by – and in turn are attacking – George Feenstra and his church's actions.

With the attacks of the BC Liberals on labour and social services, the opening of the Grace Memorial Church to people who have nowhere else to go is an act of necessity for the diverse



George Feenstra outside of Grace Memorial Church in Mount Pleasant, August 2003

community in Mount Pleasant.

Fire This Time stopped by, enjoyed a salmon dinner with the people who had set up a small camp beneath the stairs behind the church and interviewed Minister George Feenstra. Sitting on the front stoop of the church, we discussed poverty, the people affected by it and the institutions that create it.

When did you open the doors of the church to people for the first time?

What we did was, at about Easter time, we decided that if this is going to be a useful place for the community, it wouldn't be a great idea to have the doors locked, and we just left the doors unlocked.

We put tea on and cookies on and decided that whoever comes through the door, comes through the door.

All kinds of people started coming in. This guy from across the street started coming in to practice piano. At the same time these folks started coming in, sleeping and helping themselves to tea and cookies. We decided, 'Ok, the idea is that whoever comes, comes, and well, they're people.' We decided that we would make no distinction, they are neighbours so they are welcome to come in.

The neighbours have the idea that we intended to bring these people here, that we did it for political reasons. This really isn't the case, they just started coming because they discovered it was safe and hospitable. That is the main thing, that we are hospitable, and they came because we treated them like that.

What is the response from people who regularly attend your church and people who are members of your church?

I have spent three years working with the congregation preparing them for change. They hired me to change things. They are an older congregation, most of the folks have moved out to Burnaby into retirement places. When this happened, they were surprised but... they accepted it. They had questions about it, but their main questions were like, 'How come the tea towels are in the wrong drawer?' They just didn't like that their space was changing. They struggled and they struggled and they continue to struggle with their fears but they have been very courageous about it. They had a chance to turn the whole thing down. I told some of my bosses in the bigger church that if the board decided to shut the whole thing down, I would submit to that, I would accept that. The board decided to let the whole thing continue just the way it is. That was a big, big courageous thing

for these old folks to do. I was very, very proud of them.

What is the response from the people in the neighbourhood?

The most direct response has been from people in this house, (points to the houses surrounding the church) this house and this house... this house over here has been pretty good. They are directly affected because it is in their face so they have been really mad. They have come over here with all kinds of ultimatums and threats including physical violence, torching the church, suing the church. The most active protest has come from the neighbour across the back lane who brings his dog to shit on the church's lawn every day, sometimes twice a day. That sort of encapsulates their response: 'Crap on you, shit on you.'

The broader neighbourhood is mixed. We get all kinds of folks walking up to the door saying it's good what you're doing, good on you.

The most significant group is called 'Dickens Community Group'. They are really in a knot about all this. They have been working hard to keep the streets clean, to keep the garbage off the streets and 'George has let the garbage come right into the neighbourhood,' that's their position.

They are now circulating a petition. They have got a lawyer working with them. The lawyer is trying to figure out how to sue me, sue the church, and sue the board, how to shut it down legally. We will see how that goes.

Mount Pleasant is not a rich neighbourhood. Surely, many people who live in the neighbourhood are deeply affected by the BC Liberal cuts to services and attacks on labour. Why is there such a negative response from people who live in Mount Pleasant?

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Students Resist Tuition Hikes!

By Nic Brown

Students from Langara, Douglas, and Vancouver Community Colleges showed up to protest a talk given by Minister of Post-Secondary Education Shirley Bond at VCC on Tuesday, September 16th.

The protest took place at VCC's King Edward Campus at nine in the morning and was attended by about thirty students, who were informed on a day's notice. The protest was geared primarily towards issues of accessibility to education, more specifically the lowering of tuition fees.

In 1996, the NDP government in BC implemented a tuition freeze policy in regards to post-secondary education, and this continued until November 2002, when the new Liberal government, headed by Gordon Campbell, simultaneously lifted the tuition freeze while cutting provincial funding to transfer institutes as well as universities. This has resulted in the sky-rocketing of tuition fees for students across BC, many of whom are now forced to drop out of school, get second or third jobs (thereby increasing the difficulty and length of their educations), or fall deeper

into debt. Also, VCC, one of the poorer colleges in the province, has lost one third of its enrollment compared to last year.

This continues to be prevalent in other campuses as well. College and university administrations have had to work under tighter budgets since the cuts, and consequently raise tuition fees by as much as 500% for some programs. At Langara College and UBC, tuition has increased steadily over each semester – and projections seem to point out that overall tuition fees in BC will be rising by 25% over the next six years. This would seem to be a strategy to completely compensate for money that could have been collected from tuition fees during the NDP-sponsored freeze.

Furthermore, many colleges and universities have taken to new registration systems that will electronically drop students from their courses if they have not paid their fees within five days of registration. Similar unfair course refund policies are being implemented by colleges and universities province-wide.

Students unions from across

the province have organized demonstrations, campaigned, and protested these new policies and the BC Liberals' approach to education. These policies are discriminatory, limiting accessibility for less financially privileged seekers of education.

The Langara Students Union calls for an end to this unfair treatment, the unfair policies, and demands a roll back of tuition fees as well as more provincial funding for post-secondary education. Students or people interested in helping can seek their students union society for support – or lobby their provincial and federal governments, starting with your local MP, MLA, or Shirley Bond, Minister of Post Secondary Education for BC. Participate in your campus tuition boycott and get involved in the cross-campus Provincial movement for fair and accessible education for all. Education is everyone's right:

**STOP THE TUITION HIKES NOW!
MAKE EDUCATION FAIR AND ACCESSIBLE!**

Nick Brown is a student/social activist and a member of the Langara Students' Union.

Increasing Tuition: Denying the Right of Education

The Two-Tier Education Agenda in BC

By Leah McKenzie-Brown

'That's exactly what tuition fees represent. They're economic barriers to education.'
- Scott Payne, UVIC Students Society Director of Services

A foundation of Gordon Campbell's election platform was a commitment to education on all levels. The meaning of this commitment became clear at the beginning of the first spring term of the BC Liberal government.

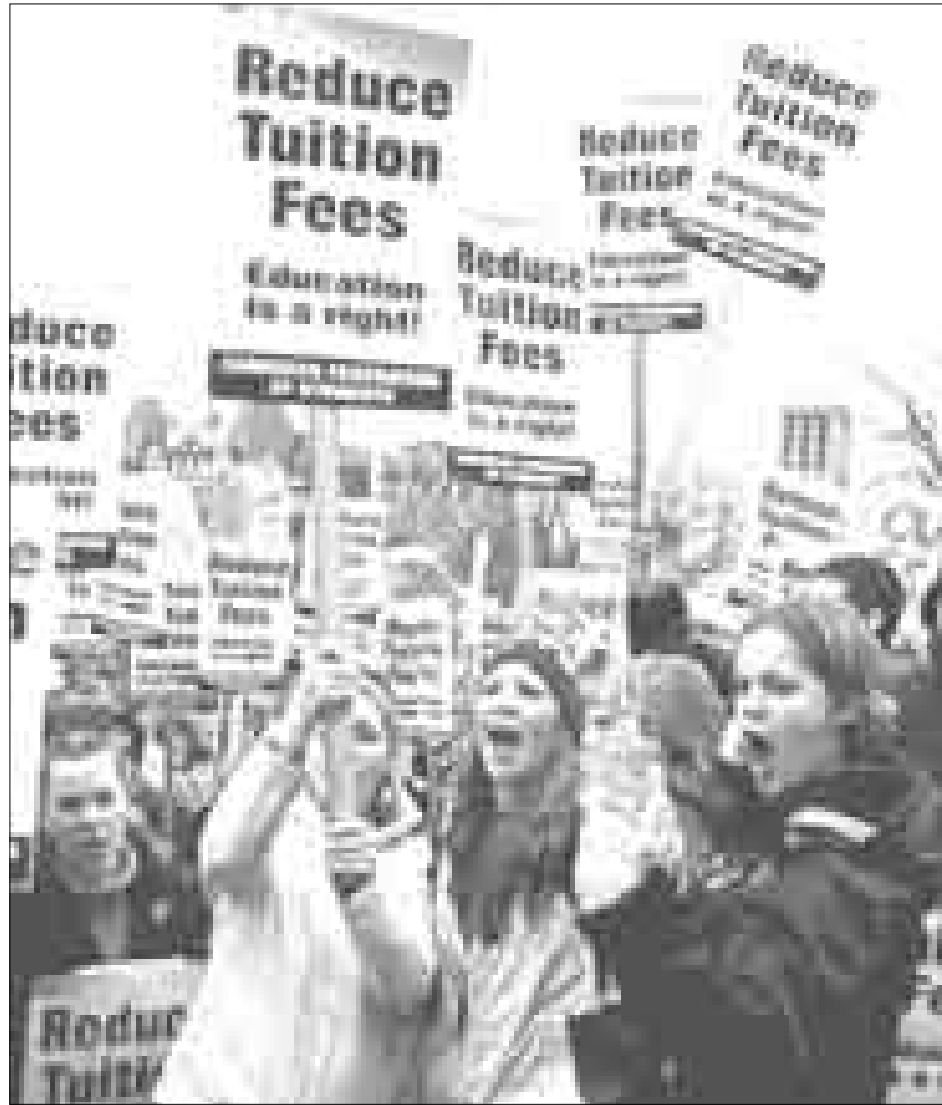
Already, only 55% of those from families that make less than \$55,000 a year attend post-secondary schooling, compared to 83% of those from families with an annual income over \$80,000. Last year, students at the University of British Columbia paid \$2,661 in tuition; this year: \$3,459. This 30.4% increase is added to last year's 25.7% increase to widen the gap between those who can and those who cannot attend post secondary school. The Liberals only commitment is to establishing education in BC as a privilege afforded only to the already privileged few.

Cutting Education Access and Quality

In January 2002 the Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act was passed. The closed collective agreements of faculty and staff were reopened before their term, and were destroyed. Without consultation or input, faculty were forced to take on more students in their classes, and teach on-line education. Kwantlen College, a community college with campuses located in the suburbs of Vancouver that cater to lower income students, was prominent amongst institutions that lost 25% of their hours of instruction.

Immediately following the reduction of quality of services in lower-tier education, in February of 2002, the Liberal government announced that the six-year tuition freeze which had been in effect since 1995 would be lifted and tuition would be completely deregulated. This was further complimented by the cut to funding for 10,000 work-study jobs -- relied on by less privileged students -- and the elimination of grants which had been issued to first-year students entering university.

Of course, not all students' education is expected to suffer under increased class sizes, reduced hours of instruction and stressed out teachers. In order to allow those who can afford it to buy themselves a good education while withholding the same privileges from those who cannot,



Students protest against tuition increases, February 2002

the Liberals introduced deregulation of tuition fee responsibility to institutions themselves. Then, in March 2002, they introduced the 'Degree Authorization Act' to allow private institutions to set exclusive tuition rates, to offer exclusive education and to grant exclusive degrees.

Two-Tier System

Even at a primary and secondary school level, the BC Liberals are maneuvering to further the dual tier approach to education. Also in the spring of 2002, the School Act was passed to introduce private funding and business competition into the public school system.

'School District Business Companies' were immediately started by the New Westminster and Vancouver School Boards to raise money for their education programs. Included in these business plans has already been the establishment

of over 20 'offshore' BC primary and secondary school programs in China, Japan and Taiwan. Despite the irony of raising money through creating private schools for international students abroad, the local effects of this business voyeurism are greater profits and therefore better education for those schools with greater investment revenue. With the cuts to education and the attacks on teachers' bargaining rights, this means decreased quality of education for schools in poor and working class areas. The BC Liberals have established an early two-tier education system within the public school system beginning even at the primary level.

Attack on Immigrants and Low Income People

Vocational training, as a field heavily dominated by women, particularly from immigrant communities and communities

of colour, has seen some of the highest increases of all. Vancouver Community College (VCC) has seen increases ranging from 40% to 566%. Hairdressing has soared 279% to \$4990 for a ten-month programme, practical nursing by 60%, and Home Support/Resident Care has increased by 167%.

By limiting access and heightening barriers to vocational training, women and men from communities of colour face even greater restrictions to 'high education.' By making 'non-essential' education an unattainable privilege for people who are most oppressed in British Columbia, the BC Liberals have further entrenched the racist and sexist division of labour in the BC workforce.

By entrenching this field of manual, vocational and technical labour within a growing population of immigrant and refugee communities, the Liberals are guaranteeing the lowering of wages and conditions in the specific labour markets that the economy depends on. At a time when fewer and fewer white Canadians are entering trades and with the coming dependence of the workforce on immigrant labour, this two-tier approach to education cannot be separated from the BC Liberals' overall agenda of furthering a blunt two-tier class system with fewer and fewer lower income people skilled and educated.

Education Must be Accessible and Free

Tuition increases are a clear attack on all working people, especially marginalized people, and a divisive tactic to keep the education system out of reach for low-income and marginalized people. It has been designed to force working people to pay for the tax cuts that the Liberal government has given to the corporations and big business since it came to power two years ago. Draconian tuition increases push working people deeper into poverty by increasing the debt to the financial institutions and consequently lowering the standard of living for British Columbians.

All working, poor and oppressed people in BC must demand free education at all levels. The struggle for equal access to education is the struggle for equal opportunities, rights, securities and fair wages and conditions in the workplace. Not only must the BC Liberals retract all their cuts to education: they must fully fund education for all people residing in BC.

Tuition: A Glass Ceiling over the Entire Province

An interview with Rick Oullet

By Leah McKenzie-Brown

The rise in tuition fees and cuts to grant funding, both implemented by the BC Liberals, have affected students in BC in very real ways. Despite the deep political significance of these attacks as part of Gordon Campbell's overall agenda, the most immediately disastrous human effects of these cuts are the lives, dreams and dignities lost by all the people who will be forced to drop out or never go to school.

Rick Oullet is halfway through his fourth year at SFU doing a Master's degree in Archaeology. As an indigenous full time student with three children, Rick is among those directly targeted by the agenda of the BC Liberal

Government.

The cuts to education have deeply impacted the lives of thousands of oppressed people in BC. Fire This Time interviewed Rick Oullet at the beginning of the 2003 fall semester, and the beginning of the third tuition increase under the BC Liberal Government.

Since the Campbell government has come to power and universities have been able to set their own tuition, there have been three increases of increments of 30% at SFU. How has your situation changed?

Student loans haven't been increased in ten years. So, it's gone from a situation where I had to work one day a week because I was short a couple

hundred dollars every two weeks to a situation where now I am working 17.5 hours a week here at university plus doing a work study because I've had to bring my family here and it's very expensive. Otherwise I would have to drop out of school. The situation's gotten progressively worse. I was able to do it, and I think I am probably fortunate. I think that if I had waited until now to come to SFU for my undergrad, I wouldn't have been able to do it. It's also important to mention that the job that I have now is making pretty good money at \$17.50 an hour -- it's a part time position -- is because I have a BA. So now I'm making pretty good money versus what I was making before, which was... you know,

you're lucky to find a ten dollar per hour job without a degree. That's the way it is and a lot of people work for like eight and six dollars and it's just fortunate how it's happened for me and I'm able to be here.

Has this been amplified or compounded by other cuts by the BC Liberals?

Things have definitely come up, as far as cutting back on welfare payments, for example. When I first came to school, because my income was at a certain point after books, my family was able to be topped up a few hundred dollars a month, which quickly was gone right away. The training wage and the whole downturn in the economy made jobs suddenly

harder to get. Also, since the Liberals came in the benefits you get for being low-income as far as dental and health benefits are greatly slashed. It now only covers the costs of things like cleaning so all the dental work I get done on my kids is basically costing me money, it's like four or five hundred dollars a year which was covered before, and a lot of medical and drug costs which were covered before. It's a total attack on the poor. You can completely see it.

How do these cuts affect people in oppressed and marginalized positions, specifically?

I think it's the debt. In my

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Tricks and Treaties: The BC Liberals Continue their attacks on Indigenous People

By Mike Krebs

On September 4th 2003, the BC government launched another attack on Indigenous people and their rights when it announced that it was making an offer to the Haida Nation of 200,000 hectares of land.

Despite the claims by Attorney General Geoff Plant that this was a 'reasonable and fair' offer, it is a far cry from the land claim that the Haida Nation are currently pursuing. The BC Liberals' offer only amounts to 20 % of traditional Haida territory, and yet the government wants the Haida to suspend their BC Supreme Court claim in return for this proportion of the land.

As Guujaaw, chief of the Haida Nation, put it, 'What they're not talking about is giving us 20% of the Crown Land on Haida Gwaii, they're asking us to surrender 80% of our land.'

Through the BC Supreme Court, the Haida Nation are claiming ownership of their traditional territory: the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii), including offshore oil and gas rights. Essentially, this is demanding acknowledgement of the Haida's existence as a nation, in line with their inherent rights to self-determination, as opposed to the current colonial relationship that the BC Liberals intend to continue and further entrench through the insulting offers they are currently trying to force on Indigenous people in BC.

A full half of the land being 'offered' would not even become the private property (fee simple) of the Haida Nation;

instead, according to a September 3rd BC Treaty Negotiations Office press release, the agreement offers options on '100,000 hectares that may include Crown land tenures, protected-area status, and co-management and/or revenue-sharing arrangements.' Much of this land, including Duu Guusd, the largest parcel, is currently protected from development under part 13 of the Forest Act, and, according to the Treaty Negotiations Office, is of 'high economic value.'

Essentially, the government is offering the Haida the right to 'share' in some of the profits to be made off of the plundering of this land, as it is only through this 'offer' that this area of land can be opened up for logging.

Predictably, Weyerhaeuser, the major logging company with its eyes on Haida Gwaii, welcomes this 'offer.' Weyerhaeuser has been attempting the further theft of the Haida Nation's forestry resources for quite some time, and has had to deal with the February ruling in the *Haida Nation vs. BC and Weyerhaeuser* case, where the BC Court of Appeal ruled that the provincial government and Weyerhaeuser have 'a legally enforceable duty to the Haida people to consult with them in good faith,' and that this duty 'extended to both the cultural interests and the economic interests of the Haida people.'

Through this latest 'offer,' Weyerhaeuser hopes to give the appearance of fulfilling this duty to consult with the Haida over logging and share some of the revenues, while still ensuring that the vast majority of control over these logging resources,



Rally Against the Treaty Referendum in Victoria, May 25th 2002.

and the profits to be made by having this control, fall into the hands of Weyerhaeuser.

Clearly the Haida Nation saw through this cheap attempt to get them to agree to the theft of their resources, and Guujaaw, chief of the Haida Nation, rejected the BC Liberal's offer. He also stated that the lawsuit over the Haida's claim to Haida Gwaii will continue.

The real results of the Treaty Referendum

The Haida Nation made their claim

through the BC Supreme Court, and their decision to pursue their interests through this path, as opposed to participating in the BC Treaty Process, should be seen as a response to the BC Liberals' racist referendum on treaties.

After the BC Liberals announced this referendum, which is to date the most visible of the attacks they have made on Indigenous people, the Haida Nation responded to the provincial government's escalation, not by backing down, but instead with an unprecedented claim to their entire traditional territories, including offshore rights.

This is not the way the province intended Indigenous people to respond to their referendum on treaties. By fueling racist divisions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, the BC Liberals' referendum was designed to force Indigenous people to accept less from their attempts to assert their rights and title over the land and resources that have been stolen, and continue to be stolen, from them.

As with the continued attacks being made on Indigenous people by the Federal government, through the proposed First Nations Governance Act and other pieces of the 'legislative package' they are trying to push, this is about marginalizing discussions and negotiations between Indigenous nations and the government away from talk about nation-to-nation agreements or self-determination. Instead, both the provincial and federal government are saying 'Let's talk about limited access to this patch of land for now,' or, in the case of the First Nations Governance Act, 'Let's talk about changing band council structure for now,' while avoiding entirely any discussion of the real rights of Indigenous people. Whether we are talking about self-determination of Indigenous people, rights recognized under international law, or even rights recognized by Canadian constitutional law, the provincial government is not willing to acknowledge, let alone respect, any of these rights.

Agreements in Principle, or unprincipled agreements

The results of the BC Liberals' treaty referendum on the restriction of rights imposed on Indigenous people participating in the BC Treaty Process can be seen in the recently established Agreements in Principle, or AIPs, that the government announced it had reached on July 29th with two First Nations, the Lheidli T'enneh and

Support the Cheam Resistance to the Elk Creek Development!

By Mike Krebs

On October 2nd, in protest of logging operations currently happening on Cheam Mountain, members of the Cheam First Nation and their supporters successfully shut down a CN railway line that runs through the Cheam reserve.

The blockade lasted until the late evening of the same day. According to one eyewitness, 'at around 11 PM, RCMP began arresting mostly young women blocking removal of two vehicles placed on tracks. The RCMP were aggressive and abusive (as usual). On several occasions RCMP tried to grab video cameras off people. One woman got a fractured arm, and an elder had bruise marks on [her] arms.' The seven people arrested were released later that night, but the next day, the Cheam and their supporters blockaded the CN railway again.

Members of the Cheam Nation and their supporters are resisting the development of an area on Cheam Mountain known as Elk Creek. The mountain, just east of Chilliwack, is part of the traditional territory of the Cheam, who are part of the Stó'lō Nation. The Elk Creek forest is used by the Cheam people for hunting, gathering medicinal plants and spiritual practice, and has been used for these purposes throughout the people's history.

Cattermole Timber began logging in the Elk Creek area in mid-September without the consent of the Cheam. The logging is connected to a larger development on the mountain by Resorts

West, a company that hopes to build a 1000-unit residential development and ski hill in the area.

The blockades on October 2nd and 3rd were the latest in a series of actions that the Cheam and their supporters have taken since the logging began, and the decision to carry out these actions came after futile attempts by the Cheam to get the BC government to respect their inherent rights to decide what should happen on their own territory. According to June Quipp, an elder and former Chief of the Cheam Nation, 'We have tried negotiations, litigation and written notices [and] so far none of these tactics have worked. It does not matter what we say, governments, and big corporations go ahead and do what they want even if it means destroying someone else's life.'

On October 5th, a meeting was set up between Mike De Jong (the BC Minister of Forests), the Cheam members who are opposed to the development, and various supporters of the Cheam struggle. The result was a partial victory for the Cheam: a seven-day stoppage of the Elk Creek logging and an assurance by the RCMP that the two vehicles confiscated on October 2nd would be returned.

This partial victory should be applauded, and should serve as an inspiration for the Indigenous struggles for self-determination that are going on all over North America against Canadian and American colonialism. It should also serve as an inspiration for all poor, working, and oppressed people who are under attack by the BC government. The Cheam have showed through

their resistance that it is only through organizing and fighting back that attacks on the livelihood of oppressed people can be challenged.

However, this 7-day stoppage is still a partial victory, and the struggle of the Cheam against the theft of their resources continues. It is important for all poor, working, and oppressed people to stand in solidarity with this struggle to make it stronger, which, if successful, will weaken the BC government's ability to carry out its larger agenda against the people of BC.

In solidarity with the Cheam resistance, we demand a complete end to the development of Cheam Mountain, no RCMP presence on Cheam territory, and support the inherent right of the Cheam people to determine what will and will not happen on their own land.

There are a number of ways people can show support for the Cheam in their fight against the development of Cheam Mountain. The Cheam protesters need bodies, funds, and other basic supplies to sustain their actions. People who are interested in showing their support can contact June Quipp at (604) 794-5715, or by email at junequipp@hotmail.com.

There is also a gathering being planned for October 11th-13th in Cheam by the Vancouver Native Youth Movement to show support and solidarity. For more information email nymchapter604@hotmail.com.

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Beyond the Law: The BC Liberals' Preparatory Attacks on Human Rights and Legal Aid

By Ivan Drury

In early 2002, the BC Liberals issued a string of cuts to vital social services. Amongst these cuts were two important changes that established their firm legal control over the province: cuts to legal aid services and the elimination of the BC Human Rights Commission.

With the loss of Legal Services and the Human Rights Commission, people under increasing attack by the government and other powerful bodies in British Columbia lost the systemic means to challenge the systemic discrimination that the entire agenda of the BC Liberal Government is built upon.

Scrapping Human Rights is Good Business

'(The Human Rights Commission) performs no useful function and is responsible for most of the undue delay and costs of the current structure.' - BC Business Council, 2001

'One constituent group that I am concerned about is certainly the impact these agencies have on businesses.' - BC Attorney General Geoff Plant

The BC Human Rights Commission's (HRC) annual report for 2001 logged 19,000 telephone and email inquiries, an increase of 22% over previous years. These inquiries represent tens of thousands of examples and instances of human rights abuses. The role of the HRC in these complaints was to investigate and report on the systemic root of these complaints. Just days after this report was issued, the government rebutted with the news of the death of the commission.

Attorney General Geoff Plant announced that the duties of the commission would be handed over to the BC Human Rights Tribunal but he neglected to explain how the Tribunal would carry out the work of the commission.

The BC Human Rights Commission and the Tribunal worked together, but the commission acted as an advocate and an educator for oppressed people in the province while the tribunal acted as the judge over cases of human rights abuse. Without the commission, people who struggle under systemic abuse like racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia must go before the tribunal alone. Even legal assistance has been withdrawn from claimants who must defend their cases against the legal teams of the powerful bodies they bring claims against.

To compound these difficulties, there is the added fear of failure: if the claim fails, the tribunal can order the claimant to pay legal and other costs to the government body or corporation the claim was brought against.

Geoff Plant and the Liberals have brought the same 'non-biased' conflict resolution approach to the field of human rights abuses that they have applied to conflicts between workers and bosses and tenants and landlords. This approach denies the racist and sexist class-structure of Canadian society and pretends that conflicts between the powerful and the oppressed could all be resolved if only 'we could all get along.'

However, far from 'getting along', the Liberals' long-term strategy depends on the continued and entrenched division of workers along the lines of race, sex, nationality, sexual identity and religion. The elimination of the HRC allows the Liberals to carry out their agenda without



Rally against the BC Liberals in Penticton, October 26th 2002

any legal accountability and places the responsibility of the defense of human rights squarely on the shoulders of oppressed and working people themselves.

Justice: If you can afford a lawyer

'If legal aid fails, justice fails.' - Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada

In February of 2002, the Amendments to Legal Services Society Act (Bill 45) was introduced, issuing a \$33.3 million government funding roll-back to legal aid over a four-year period.

Geoff Plant ordered the board of the Legal Services Society (LSS), a non-profit organization that handles all legal aid applications and cases for the Province of BC, to implement the budgetary cuts themselves. The LSS board twice refused to co-operate with the cuts. In February 2002 Plant appointed a government staff person to replace the entire board.

On May 9, 2002, the first change implemented by the new LSS was an adjustment of the mandate of the society. Only cases where legal coverage is mandated by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the courts are guaranteed funding. The funding for all other cases was made 'optional.'

Cutting Womens' Rights Out of Family Law:

On May 22, 2002, Family Law Services were severely reduced. Under Bill 45, all Family Law cases must be referred by emergency services personnel to even be considered. The applicant must be a documented victim of physical abuse and likely need a physical restraining order. The child or children in the case must require legal protection from abuse or violence through restraining, supervised access or custody orders or the custody case will not be covered by legal aid.

With this cut, the BC Liberals have reduced access to family law to women whose relationships have already reached a crisis point of abuse for long enough that they have been institutionalized. Married women in BC now have little choice but to remain in emotionally abusive and non-crisis-level physically abusive relationships. This is not only the case for poor women, who have lost all access to divorce law, but even for middle class and wealthy women. Traditionally, women, particularly women living in abusive relationships, do not have access to family assets to pay for lawyers to proceed with divorce and custody cases.

Bill 45 has impacted all women's right to choose the terms of their relationships, the lives of their children, and ultimately their own lives. This loss of choice translates directly into women's position in the workforce as they struggle within Canadian gendered gaps of pay and securities as 'supplementary' or 'secondary' incomes or as victims of sexist separation agreements as resourceless single mothers.

Putting Poor and Working People in Prison:

The LSS amendments have eliminated Poverty Law from the mandate of Legal Aid. If a person has lost their employment, been denied EI, been kicked off welfare, or require any other legal services under Poverty Law, they now must represent themselves in court. The effect of this is obvious: poor people have no legal way to challenge illegal discriminations or attacks that are a daily component of poverty in BC.

While the cutting of funding for Poverty Law will increase desperation for poor people in BC, the qualifications for legal aid in criminal cases will translate this desperation into incarceration. Already, the majority of provincial prisoners were unemployed at the time of their trial and 80% of them are incarcerated for non-violent offences.

In order to qualify for Legal Aid for criminal offences resulting in likely imprisonment, a single person can earn no more than \$925 a month. A family

of five: no more than \$1,975. A family making even substantially more than this still lives below the poverty line in BC. The only people in BC who are allowed legal representation in a criminal case are those who can afford to pay for their own lawyer, or those who live far below the poverty line: low-wage workers and lower-income working families must fend for themselves.

Helping to Create a Base of 'Illegal' Workers in BC:

As of March 31st, 2004, the province will no longer fund immigration and refugee claims. Geoff Plant claims that this is the responsibility of the federal government, but so far, no one has come forward to take responsibility for this funding.

In 2001 / 2002 there were 3,110 immigrant and refugee claims for legal aid in BC. The vast majority of these claims were from refugees.

On top of the expectation that these cuts will greatly increase the duration of the refugee claim process, they essentially forbid a fair hearing for people in grave danger if their claim should fail. This situation is made even more dangerous by the federal implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act in 2002 that makes detention and deportation much easier to carry out and does not allow for appeal for denied claims.

As with the other attacks, the strategy of this attack is not to keep poor people out of BC, but to heighten the level of desperation amongst oppressed communities so they have no choice but to accept sub-standard working conditions and wages. In the case of refugees, immigrants and non-status people, this means the expansion of the undocumented and unregulated super-exploited workforce in BC.

Human Rights and Justice for All:

Just as the Liberal government's attacks on Human Rights and Legal Aid have deep impacts through all factors of life for working, poor and oppressed people in BC, the unified struggle against these cuts and changes challenges the very foundation of the BC Liberal agenda. We must fight for these systemic protections against systemic abuse as the basis of all our rights and demand the re-appointment of the BC Human Rights Commission and the restoration of Legal Aid funding for all people entering the courts without effective legal representation.



Rally against the BC Liberals in Victoria, February 23rd 2003

Challenging the Humanity of Gordon Campbell:

An Interview with hunger striker Marcus MacGregor

By Ali Yerevani

As you've told me before, you've been in hunger strike for twenty-six days in order to symbolically put yourself in the front line against Gordon Campbell. Now, please tell us a little bit about yourself.

Well, my background is in physics and I'm exceptionally good at mathematics. I've won national awards, and a couple years ago I decided to take a break from working for other people and develop my own software. After a couple of years I found myself in a situation where I was living on my boat in False Creek, and unfortunately the boat caught on fire. And I barely escaped with my life, it destroyed all my possessions and my life's work.

How long have you been on welfare?

On and off ever since the fire, two years ago. I found a job briefly, but the government came in and closed the place I was working and that put me back on the welfare rolls.

Why did you decide to go on the hunger strike? What made you go with that extreme?

Well there was a point, a month before the strike, where I asked the Premier a couple of questions. I got avoidance kind of responses.

One question I had was "What will happen April 1st when all these people get kicked off welfare?" and I gave it to him in multiple-choice form. So you had "a) fair employment; b) forced labour; c) prison; and d) starvation."

I wanted him to answer the question, and unfortunately I got passed around on this, with no one really answering my question.

So I decided to do the hunger strike to sort of offer myself as a symbol of what is going to happen to a person when April 1st rolls around, and they're there and they're starving right outside the government's door and what are they [the government] going to do about it?

They answered my question by doing nothing. The answer is d:

poor people can starve.

So basically, for twenty-six days, every day you were at the constituency office of Gordon Campbell, at Fourth and Dunbar. So they really didn't respond to you?

Well they had one person from the Ministry come around and assure me that the employment programs that welfare offers are more than adequate for meeting anybody's needs, which I know from experience they're not, they're hopelessly inadequate. They're meant to keep unemployed people busy because if they're kept busy the whole slave system works smoother.

Well what is interesting with this is that you are white male, you're Canadian, you're educated, but still this is happening. Still, you are at the bottom.

See, that's one of the things about my hunger strike, because I was giving them an example, a much easier example. A healthy white male; educated, smart, hard-working, really no defects whatsoever and if they can't deal

with me starving outside their door starving, saying "please employ me" then they can't deal with anybody, let alone if I was a refugee, third world, a people of colour, first nation or a single mother. And there will be thousands starving on the streets no matter where you are coming from.

So you were twenty-six days on hunger strike, which is a quite substantial time. Was there any major media interested in why you are doing this, any progressive media, I mean any media covered your protest?

None. They were quite the opposite of being interested in what I was doing. I talked to a cameraman directly about my hunger strike and he told me there is no way the media will touch it unless I'm dying on a hospital bed with a tube sticking into my arm.

I'm sure that you're going to continue your protest and get allied with whoever is fighting Gordon Campbell inhuman cuts. People like you can't afford to

give up and I'm sure this hunger strike was just part of your struggle and you are planning other things to move ahead.

The thing about the hunger strike is that before the strike I heard a lot of talk saying "Campbell is inhuman, a psychopath with no sympathy who would rather kill a poor person than help them out."

The thing is that that's a lot of talk, that talk happens all the time. People hear it and go, "Well, hmm... maybe it's kind of true." But the thing is I proved to myself 100% that it is true. I was there, starving to death and with a snap of his fingers, he could have resolved the issue, all he had to do was answer the question. But rather than just communicate, as he is an elected representative of the people, rather than actually communicate with the people, he chose to set up a situation that could have resulted in my death. One thing for sure is that my resolve to fight against Campbell is magnified tenfold.

Marcus, thank you for the opportunity for interview.

The BC Liberals and the Theft of Indigenous Resources

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Snuneymuxw, through BC Treaty Process negotiations.

These AIPs, which were reached just over a year after the results of the Liberals' Referendum on the Treaty Process were released, offer a fraction of the traditional land of the Indigenous people involved in the negotiations. According to an analysis of the AIPs prepared by Ardith Walkem, a lawyer who does work for the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the Lheidli T'enneh are being offered only 15.55 square miles, while the Snuneymuxw are being offered only 19.65 square miles.

More importantly, the Agreements in Principle do not differ from the terms of negotiation that the provincial government was using *before* the referendum: a policy of extinguishment. All the rights that Indigenous people in BC have to their traditional lands are to be ceded in the signing of the so-called 'modern treaties.' This is the most important factor in these negotiations, regardless of any other aspects being discussed. It is more important than which specific dollar amount is negotiated, or how many square kilometers each First Nation will be 'allowed' to have.

In terms of reaching any sorts of agreements that would be in the interests of Indigenous people, what is fundamentally flawed about these treaties is that they force Indigenous nations (or portions of them, since most of the 'Bands' or 'First Nations' that are negotiating are only parts of larger Indigenous nations) to give up any rights they have to determine their own destiny, to exist as sovereign nations. The government wants to force Indigenous people to sign agreements giving up all of these, saying that they can no longer exist as sovereign nations, and anything they might have, be it land, resources, or governance, will be handed down to them by the government as it sees fit.

It should now be clear that, despite what even many of those who opposed

the Referendum on Treaties thought, the referendum was never intended to undermine the BC Treaty Process: it was meant to strengthen it.

The BC Liberals are carrying out an agenda of extinguishment that has been the policy of different colonial governments in the Americas for hundreds of years. The previous provincial government established the BC Treaty Process as a means to carry out this agenda; now the BC Liberals are directing the process towards its logical conclusion: negotiating Indigenous people out of what little they have left, and coercing them to eventually negotiate themselves out of existence.

The Battle over Resources

The conflict between the Haida Nation and Weyerhaeuser over logging highlights the fact that the question of Indigenous title can potentially threaten the ability of the BC Liberals and the capitalists they represent to plunder the province of its wealth. Every activity of the economy, whether it is logging or fishing, whether it is production, providing services, or transportation; everything happens on the land. In BC, 97% of the land is unceded Indigenous territory, without any sort of treaty or other 'legal' form of land surrender. The ability or inability of Indigenous people to assert their rights to self-determination is therefore a fundamental problem for the BC Liberals in their quest to make it easier for their capitalist supporters to plunder BC.

It is the access to these resources that is at the core of the provincial government's strategy to force First Nations to sign treaties and give up their rights to exist as nations. The situation with the Haida Nation's claim highlights well what is at stake for capitalists in BC if the BC government is not able to effectively squash the attempts of Indigenous people to assert their rights.

Looking at the other conflicts that have been going on throughout BC between



Rally against the expansion of the Sun Peaks Ski Resort, October 2001

Indigenous people and the ruling class, it is clear that control over land and resources is at the core of all of them. With the struggle being waged in Cheam over Indigenous fishing rights, conflicts in the interior over logging, the resistance of the Secwepemc to the continued expansion of Sun Peaks on unceded Native land, the battle by Indigenous people against the BC Liberals' plans for fish farms: all this points to an escalation in the attacks against Indigenous people by the BC ruling class in its drive to reverse the economic crisis in BC.

Self-determination for Indigenous People

So long as the various Indigenous nations within in BC continue to live under the colonial occupation of Canada, they will be doomed to the continued theft of their land, resources, livelihood, culture, and dignity. Negotiations with colonial governments through the BC Treaty Process will prove to be a dead end for Indigenous people, and will not provide any solution for the poverty and misery that Indigenous people face today. Without an end to the colonial occupation of Indigenous nations,

Canadian colonialism will lead to the further degradation, and even extinction, of Indigenous people.

For Indigenous people, it is essential that we not get tricked or forced into negotiating away our existence, and that we not kid ourselves about the intentions of the government when it claims to want to 'resolve' the centuries-long problems that it has created. We must fight for our inherent rights to self-determination as Indigenous people.

The non-Indigenous people of BC must realize that this provincial government that is carrying out these attacks on Indigenous people, is the same one that is attacking all poor, working and oppressed people through the gutting of employment standards, the cuts to social services, the privatization of health care, and through the multitude of other assaults that this government is launching. The struggle of Indigenous people for self-determination is a direct challenge to this agenda, and it is therefore crucial to the interests of non-Indigenous poor and working people in BC to support this struggle.

Real Estate, Homelessness, and Cuts to Social Housing

From page 1

single parents looking for work. Despite the barriers put in the way of finding a decent job, the BC Liberals have also instituted a time limit for eligibility for welfare: a two-year countdown to abandonment.

April 1st, 2004 will mark the first passing of the two-year limit of eligibility. All people who were on welfare when the new legislation was passed and all new clients as of April 1, 2002 will be cut off welfare. The streets will be flooded with those made suddenly homeless and the workforce will be flooded with people desperate for any sort of employment.

Real Estate and the Real Homeless:

'The private sector has a crucial role in providing affordable housing in the province.'

- BC Liberal response to a BC Non-Profit Housing Association questionnaire, March 2001

'You know, there, it's a mugs game when you mix the two words social housing and affordable housing.'

- Rich Coleman, Solicitor General, Jan 2000 on CBC radio when he was Liberal Housing critic under former government

At the beginning of September this year, the depth of the housing crisis and the historical problem of homelessness under the ruthless housing market in Vancouver was revealed by, of all things, forest fires.

Hundreds of homeless people live in Stanley Park, mostly ignored by police and city officials. This summer, dry forests and the fear of Kelowna-esque fires in Vancouver itself led to a media storm around these camps.

On September 10th, 2003, Gordon Campbell demanded that the City of Vancouver evict the homeless people from Stanley Park saying, 'Frankly, the parks board should be enforcing their bylaws.' Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell replied saying, 'You'll never find them, they've been there a hundred years.'

Deeper than the logistical problem of locating all the homeless people in the city for arrest, removal or displacement is the political problem that no government in BC has ever answered. Homelessness is a symptom of a housing market that depends on abandoned buildings to create artificial housing shortages to boost rental prices of market units and real estate speculation by big landlords who sit on properties ('investments') until the area gentrifies ('improves'). This housing market will always demand more than renters can afford for the poorest conditions tolerable. Homelessness is a sad and unfortunate, but acceptable

side effect of the ravages of this market for these land owners, big business real estate, industry, and the government. Although this problem has not been created by the BC Liberals, they are doing everything in their power to escalate the profits of the real estate market, and consequently: the housing crisis and homelessness in BC.

The Cuts to Social Housing:

In October of 2001, after only a month of holding power in Victoria, the BC Liberals froze all social housing spending and put all 1,700 units scheduled to be built under review. Following the elimination of Federal funding for housing in 1993, BC was one of only two provinces left that still funded social housing. The Liberals have dropped this responsibility to the narrow shoulders of

Rich Coleman introduced the amendments to the Residential Tenancy Act, saying; 'The new legislation strikes a balance between the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants.'

This 'balance' closed the Nanaimo and the Downtown Residential Tenancy Office (RTO). Eighty percent of the population of the downtown West Side are renters who functionally lost all means of fighting evictions or other tenancy disputes. Renters in Nanaimo must travel to Victoria for tenancy disputes.

Despite the many harmful aspects of the new Residential Tenancy Act, such as higher damage deposits, monthly inspections, move-out inspection regulations that guarantee the withholding of security deposits, landlord entry clauses and unappealable rent increases – the most damaging

of Human Resources

In September, 2002, a letter was sent out to 13,000 people on Disability Level 2 under the old legislation. This letter commanded them to re-apply through the new regulations by a deadline of January 15th, 2003 or be cut off welfare completely by April. The re-application package was even more overwhelming, bureaucratic and terrifying than the onerous application process people have been forced through under the old legislation.

The back-ups at clinics and doctors offices and the panic rippling through disabled communities complicated the re-application enough that the government was forced to push the deadline back to April. The applications were processed and the results were released two months late, in August 2003.



Woodward's Squat, 2002.

Municipal Governments and their championed 'private sector.'

There are no plans for new provincially funded housing projects under development, yet there remains a growing housing crisis in the city of Vancouver. It is estimated by city reports that the average rent in a one-bedroom apartment in the city is 142% of the monthly income of a single person receiving regular welfare benefits. According to the 1996 census, 47% of all renters pay over 30% of their income to rent and one in four renters pay more than half their income to rent. Only 8.5% of the housing stock in the city is social housing.

The Residential Tenancy Act:

'These changes will stimulate a healthy rental market and improve rental choices, while reducing the over 20,000 costly, time consuming and confrontational residential tenancy arbitrations held each year.'

- Rich Coleman, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2002

At the same time the cuts to social housing were coming through,

is the complication of arbitration. With the closing of the downtown RTO, the existing RTOs are flooded with complaints and arbitration requests. The day-long line-ups alone are enough to dissuade anyone from following through with a complaint, let alone someone who is working two full time jobs to make rent.

Behind this legislation is the hostility of the housing market. When the market is 'bad' and there are more spaces for rent than there are tenants, it does not matter what the laws are; if the rent goes up to unreasonable levels, the renter can leave for a cheaper place and the landlord will be left with an empty suite. However, the market in Vancouver is 'healthy' so rents are high and tenants have little choice over what they can afford to accept. The question becomes: eat or pay the rent?

Cuts to Disability:

'Today, I am pleased to update you on the new initiative that will open more employment doors for people with disabilities in British Columbia.'

- Murray Coell, Minister

They were the opposite of what everyone expected.

In September 2002, when the re-application letters were sent out, there were 61,932 people receiving disability benefits in BC. In September 2003, after the applications were processed, the number had grown to 65,516 people receiving benefits under the new regulations. Only 400 people had been cut from disability rolls, most of them voluntarily because of changing situations.

A Failed Experiment:

Minister of Human Resources, Murray Coell made a transparently false claim in an August 11th news release, saying 'This long-overdue review was about fairness, we are protecting services for those who depend on them.'

However, by their own claims, the Ministry put through the review process with the plan of eliminating 10,000 people from disability welfare every year. Above all, their failure to carry out this attack must be taken as a victory for disabled people and for working people

throughout BC. However, the attack is not abandoned and it cannot be forgotten. With massive opposition to the cuts to disability and this agenda in mind, Coell and the BC Liberals settled for a transitional approach.

In the long term, the Liberals have set the groundwork for the 're-introduction' of disabled people to the workforce by upping the monthly earnings exemptions for people under the People With Disabilities category. This change in itself is not problematic for disabled people; it can actually be seen as a positive change. However, in the long term it is a transition plan away from necessary support systems and into dependence on this temporary labour for survival.

In the short term, the BC Liberals discovered that people with disabilities already receive as little money a month as they can possibly survive on. The new legislation and regulations serve to limit the access of new applicants to disability welfare and define, for the government, the differences between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' welfare recipients. In the short term, the Liberals are able to use their failure to remove masses of people from disability as 'proof' of their 'good will' towards the 'deserving poor' to justify their brutal assaults on the 'undeserving poor.'

Welfare and Social Housing Now!

The BC Liberals use the unemployed as tools to manipulate the labour market, the homeless and under-housed as tools to manipulate the housing, real estate and land market, and the disabled to increase divisions amongst us all. For each group under direct attack, our rights and securities are attacked at their foundation: our dignity.

These rights, securities and dignities are reliant on understanding the depth of these attacks, and then translating this understanding into active solidarity from all working people and working people's organizations to demand:

Adequate Welfare for All in Need: No one should be driven into the workforce out of desperation.

Social Housing Now: No one should be homeless and no one should pay over 20% of their income for shelter.

Dignity for the Disabled: No one should be deprived of the medical, financial and support bases they need to survive and be healthy. Disability benefits must be increased to bring Person with Disability benefits well over the poverty line.

* To see the entire Exit Survey as presented by the Ministry, see: <http://www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/research/reports/> and click on 'MHR Exit Survey, Spring 2003'

US-led occupation of Iraq faces deepening problems

From page 2

August 1st, at least seven industry and government installations in Iraq have been struck – including an oil pipeline in Baiji, a water line in Baghdad, power lines at the Basra refinery and the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad.'

The bombing of the UN headquarters on August 20th also marked a turning point in the Iraqi resistance. Though many in the ruling class media pretended to be surprised, as if this bombing came out of left field, clearly those who carried out the bombing have no illusions about the UN's role in Iraq. This bombing came less than a week after the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1500, which 'welcomes' the US-picked Governing Council of Iraq, and it happened in a country that has faced the loss of almost one million people in the last decade as a result of the UN-imposed sanctions on the people of Iraq.

Thomas Friedman, a New York Times columnist and very important intellectual for the US ruling class, put it well in an August 31st column when he said that 'with one bomb at the UN office, they have sent a warning to every country that is considering joining the US-led coalition in Iraq: Even the UN is not safe here, so your troops surely won't be.' Aside from considering how many concessions they can get from the US in exchange for involvement in the occupation of Iraq, imperialist countries like France and Germany surely have this in mind while they consider their role in the occupation.

Problems with Shi'ite involvement in the anti-occupation movement

'Don't create problems with the Shi'ites: The present war is likely to be lost or won on the basis of whether the Iraqi Shi'ites join in. The outside Iraqi opposition cannot do this; and the US must be ready to deal with Iraqi clerics.' - Anthony H. Cordesman, Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington-based think tank), August 25th 2003

Rather than assist the US by providing an excuse for the need of the US-led occupation to provide 'security' for the Iraqi people, the bombing in Najaf on August 29th has potentially created a worse situation for the US. Since the bombing, more and more voices from the Shi'ite population have expressed deep criticism, as well as outright rejection, of the continued occupation of Iraq.

The Ayatollah Mohammed Baqer al-Imam was a very prominent Shia leader who was killed in the bombing of the Iman Ali Mosque in Najaf. Despite the fact that he provided tepid support for the US-appointed Governing Council, which his brother is a member of, he had warned before his death that 'invasion is very dangerous for Iraq and the region. The people should make the



An Iraqi man throws a stone towards a blazing Iraqi police car during a demonstration by unemployed workers demanding jobs in the country's new protection force in central Baghdad, October 1st 2003

change from inside Iraq.'

The death of the Ayatollah al-Imam resulted in an incredible funeral march that started on August 31st, involved hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Shi'ites, and had a strong anti-occupation character. Abdel-aziz al Hakim, brother of the Ayatollah and member of the US-appointed Governing Council, told the people who had gathered for the August 31st funeral march that 'the occupation force is primarily responsible for the innocent blood which is being shed every day in Najaf, Baghdad, Basra and Mosul and all over Iraq.' Mourners carried signs saying 'Saddam and Bush will not humiliate us.' According to one reporter, 'the funeral brimmed with anti-American sentiment and chanting, more vociferous than previously voiced in the broadly moderate Shi'ite community that Hakim had led.'

Problems with implementing neo-colonial rule in Iraq

The bombing of Najaf also dealt another blow to the US-appointed Governing Council, marking another shift of the Shi'ite population's support for the occupation, when Mohammed Bahr al-Uloum, a leading Shi'ite scholar, resigned from the Council.

This is but the latest in a series of failures that the US has suffered in its only option to withdrawing troops while still maintaining control over the resources and people of Iraq: to establish a US-friendly regime in the country. The appointed Security Council is being built on a fictitious foundation, lacking legitimacy among the Iraqi people, and its appointment of a 'cabinet' on

imperialist countries.

Now, only six months into the occupation of Iraq, it is painfully clear that this has brought failure after failure for imperialist countries. The occupation of Afghanistan is also in disarray. According to a Human Rights Watch report from July 2003, 'Afghan warlords and political strongmen supported by the United States and other nations are engendering a climate of fear in Afghanistan that is threatening efforts to adopt a new constitution and could derail national elections scheduled for mid-2004.'

With the establishment in the first week of September of the first cabinet to be appointed by the US-appointed governing council, and the announced plans to set up an Iraqi militia, it is clear that the US plan to reoccupy Iraq has gone so horribly that they are already falling back on neo-colonial strategy to carry out their imperialist agenda. With the current political climate in Iraq, where the occupation forces are failing on virtually every front, the attempts by the US and other imperialists to establish a puppet regime in Iraq will also fail to end the Iraqi resistance to the occupation.

Defend the self-determination of the Iraqi people

'Make no mistake: The president's vision will, in the coming months, either be launched successfully in Iraq, or it will die in Iraq... The future course of American foreign policy, American world leadership, and American security is at stake. Failure in Iraq would be a devastating blow to everything the United States is trying to accomplish, and must accomplish, in the decades ahead.' - Robert Kagan and William Kristol, in *The Weekly Standard*, September 1-8 2003

With the situation we are faced with today, as people who oppose war and injustice, the need for a strong, international antiwar movement is essential. This movement must realize that imperialism has been the primary cause of the problems which have plagued Iraq since it was drawn up and established as

a country in 1921 by the UK. It is impossible that further imperialist intervention, whether it is by the US, the UK, the UN, or any other power, could do anything but deepen the disaster it has caused for the people of Iraq.

We are seeing the most powerful imperialist superpower painting itself into a corner. The US, an imperialist country with the largest economy in the world, the largest military in the world, is watching its different imperialist strategies and tactics fail in Iraq, and is losing more and more space in which to move around. The US is failing to strengthen its position against its imperialist rivals, and it is failing to strengthen its control over the resources and people of the Middle East.

We have to understand that the US is not invincible, and that it is not solely the responsibility of the Iraqi people to wage this battle against imperialist aggression. A strong international movement against the occupation of Iraq needs to do its part to weaken the US even more; it needs to take advantage of the current situation to bring more people into the movement who are opposed to the war, who are skeptical of the path that the imperialist countries are leading us down: a path to further war, destruction, poverty, and misery. Only by continuing to demand an end to the occupations of Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan, and defending the self-determination of oppressed people, can we build an effective antiwar movement that will support the Iraqi people's struggle to end the crisis they are facing.

We need to show that the US and its imperialist competitors have no solution to this problem, that they are the source of the problem, and that so long as they pillage the planet in their drive to perpetuate capitalist tyranny, this problem will not only continue, but will get worse.

We must demand an end to the occupations of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. We must demand all imperialist troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan, and all Canadian troops out of Afghanistan.



Iraqi searched by soldiers, September 2003.

End the Attacks on Immigrants and Refugees in Canada!

By Ivan Drury

'The law under which we detained them is new and this is one of the test cases.'

- Huguette Shoulddidge, Director of Media Relations, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

'These allegations are based on very flimsy assumptions. Assumptions based on what we consider to be racially motivated intentions.'

- Arif Raza, Muslim Canadian Congress lawyer

On July 14th, the McKenzie Institute, a Toronto based right-wing think tank, published a report that said 'Al Qaeda is here.' Their proof was that Toronto holds one of the largest Islamic communities in North America. They recommended that the Canadian Government, through Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the RCMP, Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), and the Integrated Anti-Terrorism Taskforce, confront this proof head on. On August 14th, CIC arrested twenty Pakistanis and one Indian Muslim as suspected threats to national security.

'Project Thread', as these roundups were known, came to an end on September 26th when two of the men were led out of the Ontario prison where they were held, to their hearing. CIC conceded that they had no evidence to prove that any of the men could be considered a 'threat to national security'.

Although sixteen of the men arrested as part of 'Project Thread' remain in detention, CIC has dropped any charges of terrorism against them. They remain in detention awaiting hearings on their

immigration and refugee claims.

In Montreal, another Pakistani family has been held in detention since March. Bilquees Fatima and Imran Hussain, a sixty-four year old woman with severe health problems and her teenage son, were never charged with being suspected threats to national security. All the same, they are sitting in detention awaiting deportation in a case that CIC insists is 'closed.'

Also in the Montreal area, CIC has targeted over a hundred Palestinian refugee claimants. All of them are awaiting deportation with no recognized country to return 'home' to.

On the other side of the country, in Vancouver, many in the community of over one thousand non-status Chinese have been receiving letters preparing them for removals from Canada.

All across the country, refugees, landed immigrants and non-status people are being arrested and detained or thrown in jail. The most common reasons for these detentions are to verify identity or because someone who CIC is planning on deporting is considered a 'flight risk' - Minister Denis Coderre is worried that they might go into hiding.

The least common reason for these detentions is because of a supposed 'threat to national security.' However, these are the cases that are reported on, and the rationale used to justify the escalation in all detentions across the country. In 2002, there were 440 asylum seekers in detention at any given time. This year, under the provisions of the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, that average has risen to 523.



Rally in Support of Adil Charquai, a landed immigrant who lives in Montreal and is being held in detention under a CSIS 'security certificate,' despite the fact that the Canadian government has not presented any evidence to prove their allegation that Charquai has any 'Al-Qa'ida' connections.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada is defending the government's new powers of detention without evidence or charges as the sanctity of the safety of the whole of society over the liberties of the individual. Even this false rationale alone reveals the racist idea CIC holds of who a 'Canadian' is.

The use of security certificates as a provision of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to arrest and detain people is used as a cover for a war being carried out within the borders of Canada. The fight against the occupations of Iraq, Palestine

and Afghanistan abroad is the same as the fight against the attacks on refugees, immigrants and non-status people in Canada.

RELEASE ALL REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND NON-STATUS PEOPLE HELD FOR IDENTIFICATION, AS FLIGHT RISKS OR ON SECURITY CERTIFICATES FROM PRISON AND DETENTION!

REGULARIZATION FOR ALL NON-STATUS PEOPLE IN CANADA!

END THE RACIST WAR AT HOME AND ABROAD!

Interview with George Feenstra From page 6

I would guess that the basic response to that question is that there has been, over the last decade, a gentrification going on, especially here. The real estate in the area is going up every year. Folks are working hard and they are doing it very consciously. It is a beautiful neighbourhood. They have a pretty strong bias against poverty I guess. They see this turning into another suburb. The hostility is about property values going down. That's a pretty cynical view for me, but these human beings (*gestures towards the people sitting behind the church*) are interfering with their market expectations. I would be willing to be proven wrong on this, but all of the comments I am getting from them is that, 'this is ruining the neighbourhood.'

I'm guessing the support I am getting comes from the working poor; the more low-income people understand this. The phone calls we're getting suggests this just by the vocabulary and stuff. I'm getting the idea that these are working poor who know that they are one step away.

You have opened up a Pandora's Box in your church. On one hand, you have set a strong and admirable example of behaviour and action for everyone in BC, and on the other, you have alienated yourself from many elements in a community you are supposed to work within. Many deep-seated and ugly fears, hatreds and divisions amongst people have been exposed. What future plans do you have?

We have to allow the persons who are most affected to be part of the decision making processes. My guess is that if people were willing to listen to the working poor, what

By Ivan Drury

Throughout the month of August, Fire This Time (FTT) and Youth Third World Alliance (Y3WA) responded to a call out for support from a group defending two detained refugees in Montreal.

Bilquees Fatima is a 63-year-old Pakistani refugee who fled Pakistan with her teenage son, Imran Hussain, in 2001 after the murder of her husband. Racial and religious violence has swept through Pakistan, targeting Shia Muslims like Bilquees and Imran. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have clearly documented the threat that exists for Shia Muslims and particularly women. Bilquees and Imran came to Canada seeking asylum from this terror and this very real danger to their lives.

For three days, FTT and Y3WA tabled and held a presence of protest outside the removals office of Immigration Canada in Vancouver. We talked to hundreds of people about the case of Bilquees

their solutions would be, we could find our ways out of the messes we find ourselves in, in this country. But who listens to the working poor?

An example of this is, one day the cops were here hassling these people; I was in this mood and I start hassling the cop for hassling these people. A little bit later, a girl comes up and says, 'We don't need you to defend us with the police.' In other words, 'we don't need a daddy, we don't

STOP THE DEPORTATION OF BILQUEES AND IMRAN!

and Imran and were approached by people both immediately supportive and immediately hostile to the case of the family in detention across the country.

In building a movement against the Federal Government's attacks on Refugees, Immigrants and non-status people, it is crucial that we look at these individual cases as examples of broader systemically racist attacks. Through the case of Bilquees and Imran, it is clear that the Canadian Government is not acting in the interests of refugees and asylum seekers. The terrorization of Muslim communities and communities of colour throughout Canada is carried out through the targeting of individuals who are most vulnerable.

Through the mass work we did on this case, we collected over 200 signed letters in support of Bilquees and Imran and faxed them all to the Minister of Immigration, Denis Coderre. On September 17th, partly in response to the pressure from all across the country, Bilquees and Imran were allowed to

need a boss, we don't need somebody, we know how to handle this.' Learning how to make way for folks to rise up.

The whole thing with an oppressor is that they don't want people to understand their situation. All you can do is provide opportunities for them to reflect on their experience. These folks believe that this is where they belong in a certain sense. They have lost that sense of hope.

The bosses, the folks who run the economy

appeal the Citizenship and Immigration Canada decision that they were not at risk should they be returned to Pakistan. After over three months in detention, they were released.

Although Bilquees, Imran and all refugees have won a great victory in their release from detention, they are still living under threat of deportation. Fire This Time joins the Action Committee of Pakistani Refugees in calling for full status in Canada for Bilquees, Imran and all refugees and non-status people in Canada.

Show your support for the lives of Bilquees, Imran and all refugees in Canada. Get the full support letter from the Fire This Time website: www.fire-this-time.org and send it to:

Immigration Minister Denis Coderre:
minister@cic.gc.ca / coderd@parl.gc.ca / coderd1@parl.gc.ca

Phone: 613-957-0312 **Fax:** 613-957-2688

here, all they can do is keep us divided, keep us split, keep us from talking, keep us from cooperating. If we can get seven or eight crack addicts cooperating, that's scary. I have a poster I am working on, this picture here. There's these two crackheads helping us prepare for a community event we are going to have, and it's going to say, 'Do your part, get rid of greed, avarice and hypocrisy.'

Vancouver Celebrates Cuban Revolution

Speech given by Vladimir Mirabal, July 2003

By Mike Krebs

On July 26th 1953, Fidel Castro led a group of armed revolutionaries to seize the Moncada Barracks of the Batista government in Cuba. Though the attack was a failure from a strategic military point of view, politically, it was a success.

Fifty years later, in Vancouver, we celebrated that success as the anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle that lasted five years and resulted in the overthrow of the US-backed Batista dictatorship and the establishment of an independent revolutionary Cuba.

On July 24th, Vladimir Mirabal, the Third Secretary of the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa, spoke before a crowd of over 400 people at the Maritime Labour Centre. Fire This Time interviewed Vladimir in our last issue to prepare for his visit and the anniversary of the Moncada attack. We have printed below excerpts from the talk he gave that night which pronounced the crucial lessons that Cuba has to teach us here in Canada.

As we organize for our rights against our daily indignities and oppressions and for the rights of all poor, working, and oppressed people of the world against the global imperialist agenda, we must remember Cuba and offer, as Cuba does, friendship and solidarity.

Turning Point

Moncada was the turning point in the last stage of the struggle for independence in Cuba. The struggle for independence began in the 18th century, but it wasn't until... I would say 1953, that all the subjective and objective conditions in Cuba were there for the revolution. Moncada was the spark that ignited the Cuban people and the people realized that everything was ready for a social revolution. Fidel realized that the forces were there, and organized the attack on the garrison.

So on January 1st, 1959, all of them, the bearded, young guys arrived in Havana with the freedom flag in hand, led by Fidel. A lot of them died in the mountains, fighting an army several times bigger and better armed, financed and equipped by the United States through Batista. And a new world began for Cuba and Latin America.

To understand these last fifty years of the Cuban revolution, we have to focus on our context. We are a very poor country; we are a third world country. In spite of our achievements and our numbers in healthcare, in education, in culture, in sports, we are a third world country.

We are in Latin America, we are in the Caribbean, and that is very important. Perhaps, sometimes people tend to confuse, and to understand Cuba better you have to put Cuba in its own context.

Imagine the strike Cuba received in '59 when we nationalized all the American companies. For you to have just a glimpse: 90% of the electricity and telephone services were in American hands. 50% of

the railways were in American hands. More than 70% of the land was in American hands. So, we lost, overnight, with the nationalization, economic support for a process that was supposed to be beginning to build something. So we started from nothing, almost nothing. We were just producers of sugar and that's it.

They, the United States, were used to buying all the sugar we were able to make, and overnight, no sugar for the United States.

So the revolution had to find alternative ways to survive and to build that new society that we were entitled to. So those were the '60s and the '70s, and Cuba found ways to reach the '90s still being socialist, still being the way we wanted to.

The Hard Time

But in the '90s, 1989 to be exact, the collapse [of the Soviet Union] happened. So, for the second time in less than forty years, the Cuban economy lost overnight... another figure. In 1990, we lost 85% of

the railways were in American hands. More than 70% of the land was in American hands. So, we lost, overnight, with the nationalization, economic support for a process that was supposed to be beginning to build something. So we started from nothing, almost nothing. We were just producers of sugar and that's it.

And what you can read in the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* is lies. Media just has one vision, and it's not very accurate, and it's very prejudiced, and it's politically motivated. The world is misinformed about Cuba. There is a smoke curtain between Cuba and the world. Unfortunately, we don't have the resources to get our message out to the world to the extent that we would want to.

Recovery

In 1996 we stopped the decline of the economy, and it started to sustain growth. Very modest at the beginning, but in 2000 our Gross

The World at War

We are living today in a world that is at war. I'm convinced, I have no doubt. The entire world is at war. Bush said in Westpoint Base, after the September 11th terrorist attacks, that the United States would chase and track terrorists everywhere in the world, and is going to use the weapons necessary to wipe them out.

And he was more specific. He said: 'We are going to chase them in sixty or more dark corners in the world.' Those sixty dark corners are countries of the third world, I'm sure. I'm sure. None of them is Canada, none of them is Switzerland, or Spain. They are Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and so on and so on. And, Cuba.

Cuba is facing a huge risk today. First, in this world, we are convinced that there is no international court, there is no international institution able to stop the United States. There is no security council that is able to say 'stop, where are you going?

with their people. But let's see at the end who wins. I'm not going to prophesize anything here, but they're paying a price for that. They're being accountable to the people. And that works, but let's see at what extent.

Cuba Under Attack

So, to jump to Cuba, Cuba is on a list of countries sponsoring 'terrorism' since the year 1993 or 1994. This year in April the list was released, and Cuba was among another seventy countries. Why is the United States including Cuba once again on this list? To start a pretext, to sustain the blockade. To start a pretext for a future invasion, if any is possible, if it's in their plans.

We have sufficient proof – and when the Cuban government says it has proof, it has proof – that people inside the administration, within the administration, and near the administration, are pushing for an invasion of Cuba.

They're talking in Washington on how they are going to do it: not when, *how* they are going to do it. 'Are we going to do it that way, are we going through the south, are we going to bomb from there.'

Cuba today is facing – and I'm speaking with authority – is facing the most risky moment of its history. Even worse than 1898, than the explosion of main boat and the invasion of the US army, even worse. Even worse than the Bay of Pigs in 1962, in '61. Even worse than the October Missile Crisis.

Even worse because, at that time, those opportunities were in a polarized world, there were bads and goods, there were reds and blues. Now we're living in a world with just one pole, just one superpower, just one king of the world. After Afghanistan, after Iraq, the way of the law has vanished. Sovereignty doesn't mean anything for countries today. International law is the American law, is the Washington law.

Rich, Poor, and Progress in Cuba

We're living in a world that, in spite of all that, the differences between rich and poor are being widened everyday. In Manhattan, there are more telephone lines than in all of Africa. That's not fair. The maternal death rate in Africa is 40%; in Europe, it's 1.4%.

The third world countries of Latin America are paying an external debt that never ends, never ends this external debt. We have been paying the same debt, multiplied by five, for the last thirty years. It never ends. And we are more and more and more in debt.

My point is that the world is morally impaired. This order, in the nature of orders, it's unsustainable. It leads to nowhere. And unfortunately, that's our reality today.

That's why Cuba has its right, its sovereign right, to defend itself. And to take the measures it considers appropriate to defend



Vladimir Mirabal Speaks in Vancouver July 24th 2003.

our international trade, 85%.

Canada has 86% of its international trade with the United States. Imagine that tomorrow, the United States closed its border and said 'I don't buy nothing more from Canada, and you find another market.' Canada is a powerful country; perhaps Canada could look at Europe and find some place for Canadian goods and services.

But Cuba did not have that. Overnight, we lost 85% of our international trade. We imported, in 1990, 15 million tons of oil from the Soviet Union. In 1993, we imported 5 million tons from the Soviet Union, less than half. That's the period of the huge and endless blackouts in Cuba, sixteen hours, eighteen hours. No public transportation in Cuba. Factories closed. Those were hard times, *very* hard times.

The Cuban government realized that we had to figure out something, a way to get out of that situation. And we implemented some internal measures, like the double currency, some internal financial measures to clean our finances, to open the markets to foreign investment, and so on.

Domestic Product grew 4.7%. Internal measures, economic adjustments, change of strategy, change in the management of the economy, replacement of ministers, and a lot of things.

We are still growing, slower than in 2000, we are growing at two-point-something percent. But [it's] growth. And in lots of Latin American countries, it's our continent, the growth is zero, minus, it's decreasing. Japan is in recession, crisis. The European Union, it's in crisis. The United States economy, it's in crisis. Canada is much better.

That's the picture that we have today in Cuba. Recovery is slow with our own measures. That's true what you said [referring to one of the other panelists], no IMF, no nothing. We have been able to do that in spite of forty-four years of blockade from the United States – *blockade*, not embargo, blockade from the United States. Day by day, month after month. Even tightened, even more aggressive now: 1992, Torricelli law, 1996, Helms Burton law.

You cannot do that.' It doesn't exist. It was proven with Iraq. It doesn't exist. The United States is unstoppable. You cannot do nothing to stop it.

Second, the world opinion is a huge weapon against governments wanting to do wrong things, the world opinion. But it was proven not to solve, not to stop the United States. We had massive rallies, we had the biggest demonstrations ever of people protesting against the war. But it was not enough, it was proven. The United States went into the war against that.

Third, the internal, the national opinion in the United States, domestic opinion, the people of the United States that does not share the principles that are defending the Bush doctrine, the Bush administration. We counted on the American people, and it was proven that it is easily manipulated through media. Effectively, no doubt.

So, we jumped to the conclusion that the next target is going to be hit no matter what. Could be Syria, could be North Korea, could be Cuba. Now either Bush and Blair are facing huge troubles in their governments

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Defend Cuba Against US Imperialism!

By *Shahdin Farsai*

Cuba is among the few nations in the world today that have stood up against imperialism, especially from the world dictator next door. Cuba has had to struggle for its sovereignty from the very beginning; firstly from the Spaniards and secondly from the US and this struggle still continues today.

History of Struggle Against Imperialism

First, Cuba had to endure sixty years of blatant exploitation and racism, under direct American rule and later under American-backed puppet dictators. In the late 1890s, the US gave their helping hand in Cuba's fight for independence from Spain, not because they had the interest of the Cubans at heart, but because Cuba was a gold mine for business interests. The Americans took over sugar, tobacco, coffee plantations, railroads, and mines. In 1902, the direct US occupation ended only with the promise that they could intervene whenever they saw fit. It is important to mention here that at this point Cuba was the poorest it had ever been in eighty years.

For the remaining years up to the 1959 Cuban revolution, Cuba was ruled by one puppet dictator after another, all with the direction of US interests; the last one being Fulgencio Batista. Under Batista's rule Cuban society was diseased with racial oppression, illiteracy, and mass unemployment. In 1959, Fidel Castro's rebel army succeeded in fighting Batista's forces and making Cuba owned by Cubans for the first time. Supporters of Batista and his former police torturers feared the new regime, so they fled to Miami; therefore there should be no surprise why Miami is the centre of the Cuban exile community.

The Cuban-American Mafia in Miami, hand in hand with the US ruling elites, the FBI and CIA, have ceaselessly worked to bring down the Cuban revolution in whatever ways possible, whether through the funding of terrorists in Miami or the ongoing blockade; the most notable event being the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion.

Why the US is afraid of Cuba

America has upheld their embargo against Cuba for several reasons, but mainly because Cuba refuses to become yet another US playground where America feeds their addiction of profit. The Cuban people have chosen a different path to model their society, one that does not have satisfying greedy human desires at its core, but one that believes in progression through unity and communal values. The gains of the Cuban revolution reflect these values. To illustrate this point here are some facts and figures regarding the achievements of the revolution.

	1959	1999	Rank in Latin America today
Life Expectancy	60yrs	76yrs	#1
Infant Mortality	64/1000	7.5/1000	#1
Literacy	62%	98%	#1
# of Physicians	3000	65 000	#1

These achievements are truly remarkable and prove that answering the beck and call of the stock market is not the only way of life. Cuba is being persecuted because of this, because they refuse to sell out their heritage and the progressions they have made independently. The United States is afraid of this independence, and most importantly its spread. That is why we saw the US support the defeat of Chavez's coup in Venezuela.

Blockade

Currently, the US rationalizes the blockade by claiming that Cuba is the biggest violator of human rights in the hemisphere; it is actually vice versa. Respected human rights organizations have never accused Cuba of the kinds of genocide, torture, disappearances, and maltreatment of children, women, and minority groups that routinely occur in countries all over the world with which the US has perfectly normal, even preferential relations. The US also claims that Cuba is developing biological weapons and the Pentagon lists them as one of seven potential first-strike nuclear targets.

So is Cuba really a threat to US national security? A Centre for Defense Information study notes that Cuba spends in one year on its military what the US spends in twelve hours. America creates many illusions, as was proven with the invisible weapons of mass destruction that were nowhere to be found in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US creates pretexts for fights, much like a bully and also like a bully it has supporters to root for it. At the last United Nations General Assembly [regarding the] resolution against the American blockade, all nations voted condemning the blockade with only the US, Israel, and Uzbekistan rejecting the voice of world opinion, though Israel does actively trade with Cuba.

Cuban Five Political Prisoners

America's latest attack on Cuba comes in the form of unjustly imprisoning five Cuban patriots who were doing their duty to protect their nation from the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Miami mafia. Their unfair trial, which was held in Miami, indicates how within the 'land of the free' five men can be imprisoned under charges of conspiracy to commit murder

and espionage without a shred of evidence, with a tainted jury, and then receive life sentences as punishment without a shred of evidence. The Cuban Five case is one of many examples of how increasingly the US will not tolerate any dissent, especially as their war rampage continues.

The United States administration will do whatever it can do to uphold their wasteful system, in which ironically their citizens are the last to profit. Now is the time for all justice-loving people around the world to become involved in the movement for a better world in which the strong hand of imperialism has weakened. The trial of the Cuban Five was a great mockery of justice, but like all causes, people can lay idle or stand up and struggle.

Get Involved!

In July 2003, a number of Vancouver activists formed the Vancouver chapter of the Free the Cuban 5 Committee. Part of Committee activities have included organizing events in solidarity with the Cuban 5 political prisoners and organizers in the US and helping build the October 4th event with Aleida Guevara March and Irma Gonzalez in Vancouver. Since the formation of this committee members have been able to collect hundreds of signatures in defense of the Cuban Five through petitioning in Vancouver.

To become more involved in the movement for the freedom of the Cuban Five please call (604) 831-9821 or (604) 322-1764 or email cuban5_van@yahoo.com. There will also be an open meeting of the Free the Cuban Five Committee Vancouver on Thursday October 9th at 6:30 PM, at 239 East Georgia Street.

Shahdin Farsai is a member of the Free the Cuban Five Committee Vancouver and the Canada-Cuba Friendship Association.

What is the Issue at Stake?

A Reply to The Progressive Magazine

By **Rene González (One of the Cuban 5 Political Prisoners)**

July 15, 2003
Federal Correctional Institution
Edgefield, South Carolina

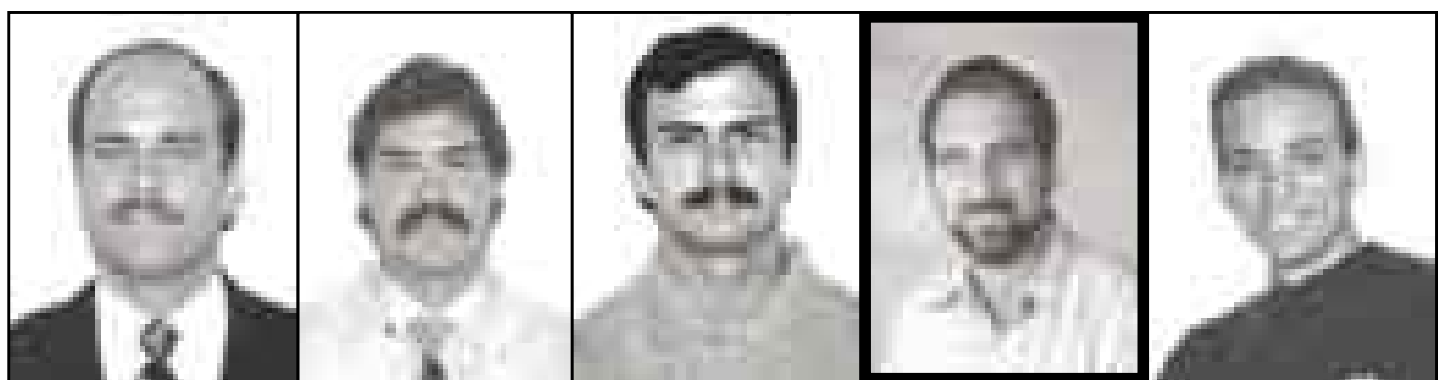
Dear Ms. Joanne Landy:

Being a Cuban revolutionary all of my life, having fought in Angola against the South African invasion and being, at the present time, incarcerated in a U.S. federal prison for protecting the Cuban people from the terrorist actions supported, encouraged and silenced by the United States government, I hope that—if being progressive is still to fight for a better world—I might be entitled to the benefit of being considered a progressive person.

So, when I opened a magazine called precisely, *The Progressive*, and read an ad by the Campaign for Peace and Democracy requesting signatures in order to condemn Cuba for its alleged "repression on dissidents," I was, at best, in disbelief. I can't imagine that somebody can consider himself a progressive person and then take at its word the endemic slandering and lies of the U.S. media in regards to Cuba.

It would only take a little bit of intellectual honesty and some research to discover that the money to pay "dissidents" is appropriated, overtly and openly, by the U.S. authorities to be distributed through entities like National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) among whomever, on the island decides to make a living as a dissident.

Who gives any moral authority to the



The Cuban Five, from left to right: Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labanino, Fernando González, **René Gonzalez**, and Antonio Guerrero.

American government to create a paid opposition in Cuba? What international principle of law applies to this behavior? Since when is it a role of a U.S. diplomat to tour the island organizing the "opposition" and giving out money?

Whoever, in his country, receives money from a foreign power to undermine his government, is considered a traitor, be it in Cuba or in any other nation of the world, including the United States. These so-called "dissidents" have—contrary to what appears in the ad—all the right to express their opinions in Cuba. All they have to do is to stand up at a nomination meeting and explain to their neighbors that they want to take the country back to 1959, return the Cuban land to the United Fruit Company, recall the terrorists that now live in Miami to the island and give them their properties back, sell the country to the transnationals and become themselves the political class who will take care of all those people's petty interests.

If their neighbors agree with them they will be nominated would happen to them for looking stupid while expressing their political platform in front of the electorate. But if they run into a revolutionary constituency—and their neighbors are committed to their country and support the government of the people, for the people and by the people; and having fought and died for their society, don't want to betray the memory of the patriots who have given their lives for the sovereignty and independence of Cuba—no "dissident" will be nominated nor will he obtain any vote.

And if they don't deserve the confidence of their people, they don't have the right to go to the American embassy—the last place I would think of as a haven for democracy—to find a source of sovereignty that only lies in the Cubans.

Cuba, for more than 40 years, has faced a state of hostility and war that has caused

more than 3,000 deaths and more than 2,000 injured on account of terrorist and armed actions carried out by traitors paid, trained and supplied by the U.S. government. Those mercenaries were dealt with through the legal system. They weren't arbitrarily declared "enemy" or "illegal" combatants, or disposed of through a drone-launched rocket so that Fidel could pose to the cameras declaring them "no longer a problem," or subjected to secret military tribunals, nor were their families' homes demolished by the Cuban military.

They were given sentences according to their involvement in their terrorist activities instead of the irrational punishment accorded here to the Puerto Rican patriots, just for their affiliation to a given organization, or the vindictive treatment given to me and my

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Imperialism's (Increasingly Rough) Road to Re-mapping the Middle East

By Derrick O'Keefe

Only four months after declaring victory in Iraq and unveiling the 'Road Map' for the Middle East, the best laid plans of US imperialism for the region have gone awry. Facing increased instability in Iraq and almost daily attacks on US troops, the Bush administration is desperate to hold together some semblance of a 'peace plan' in the Middle East.

The Aim of the Road Map

One of the key aims of the 'Road Map' from the onset was to obscure the facts on the ground, and to distract from the ongoing consolidation of the Zionist colonial-settler project. The facts have included six 'targeted elimination' attacks against Palestinians in the last two weeks of August, killing fifteen, including an eleven-year-old girl. The Israeli government's cabinet has defended these attacks as part of 'all-out war' against the Hamas militant group, which claimed responsibility for an August 19th suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed twenty-one people. This 'all-out war' is one Israel is waging against militant factions of all stripes, and Sharon and Bush continue to pressure the Palestinian Authority to help them wage it, increasing factional tension within the Palestinian camp.

While the 'Road Map' has dominated international discourse and debate over the past months, the construction of a 'security fence' across the West Bank has continued unabated. The fence, mind you, is electrified and up to eight metres high in places, and is more accurately called the Apartheid Wall. The wall amounts to a massive land grab by Israel, as it is being built on the Palestinian side of the 'Green line,' the border established by Israel in 1949.

Israel Escalates Violence

By the level of violence in recent weeks alone it would seem absurd to speak about a peace plan being implemented. The 'Roadmap,' however, was never really intended as a 'peace' plan, but rather as an imperialist plan to strengthen the strategic interests of the United States in the region and, most importantly, to end the Palestinian resistance—to quell the second Palestinian Intifada which began on September 28th, 2000.

On April 30th, 2003, still triumphant after the 'fall of Baghdad,' the US administration unveiled the 'Road Map,' a plan endorsed by the quartet of the United States, the European Community, Russia, and the United Nations. The plan called for a 'final and comprehensive settlement' to the conflict by 2005, and a Palestinian state that was to be 'independent, democratic and viable.'



Palestinians gather around a house hit in an Israeli missile attack in a densely populated area of Gaza City, September 6, 2003.

Promises to Nowhere

Much like the Oslo accords signed in 1993, the promise of statehood at some future date is being dangled, while the conditions necessary for an independent and viable state are systematically eroded. During the Oslo process, for instance, the number of illegal settlements in the West Bank and Gaza more than doubled. Similarly, in May of this year the Sharon government made a big show of tearing down a couple of scarcely populated outposts in the occupied territories, while construction continued on other fortified settlements and settler-only roads.

We should note also that this latest US plan for the Middle East appeared to have broad, multi-lateral backing. During the build-up to the war on Iraq, some

argued that the problem was the United States' unilateral stance, its willingness to act alone (or with only Great Britain's support) in implementing regime change. Having the United Nations or European Community sign on, however, does not make an intervention progressive. Both these multi-lateral bodies are arenas in which imperial powers are dominant, and in which they fight it out for influence in global affairs. France and Russia refused to vote in the United Nations Security Council for the war on Iraq before it happened, but immediately afterwards they voted to sanction the US-UK occupation and now propose a greater UN role in occupying Iraq.

What's At Stake

The multi-laterally endorsed Road Map

for Palestine is designed to strengthen US imperialism's overall dominance in the entire region. An illustration of the imperial nature of the US role in the Middle East is its presumption to determine, and one could even say invent, the Palestinian leadership. The creation of the position of Prime Minister in the Palestinian Authority's cabinet, and the creation of Mahmoud Abbas as not only PM but as a 'legitimate leader,' has been carried out for the benefit of the US and Israeli governments. Abbas, or Abu Mazen as the former PLO ambassador to Moscow is also known, is to the US rulers 'someone they can deal with.' Abbas' complete lack of support amongst the Palestinian people is not seen as relevant.

On September 2nd, Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz declared that his government had failed to do enough to marginalize PLO leader Yasser Arafat, asserting that 'I believe that he [Arafat] needs to disappear from the stage of history. The state of Israel made a historic mistake by not expelling him some two years ago.' Mofaz went on to speculate as to when would be the best time to expel Arafat from Palestine for good.

Expulsion of the indigenous population from Palestine has been a cornerstone of Zionist strategy in the region for the past fifty-five years, since the founding of Israel in 1948 and the expulsion of close to 800,000 Palestinians. For the more than six million Palestinian refugees worldwide, the 'Roadmap' contains little in regard to their plight, only mentioning the issue as one of a number of issues to be negotiated in the later phases of the plan. Israeli politicians, from Likud 'hawks' to Labor 'doves,' are united in their opposition to the right of Palestinian refugees to return, since that right challenges the exclusive and racist nature of the state of Israel.

Solidarity and Resistance

The ruling class in the United States, despite their fundamentalist ideological convictions in US imperialism, are growing increasingly worried about the unstable situation in Iraq. The resistance they are continuing to face in Iraq, not to mention the renewed resistance in Afghanistan, has made snuffing out the Palestinian struggle an all the more urgent objective.

For those in solidarity with struggles for self-determination everywhere, it makes all the more urgent the task of exposing the reality behind the Road Map, and continuing to advocate for fundamental human rights such as the right of Palestinian refugees to return.

Derrick O'Keefe is a member of the Palestine Solidarity Group. He is also a member of the Coordinating Committee of Stopwar.ca.

Interview with Rick Oullet

From page 7

situation, I graduated with a BA and I have a \$38,000 debt, which I would pay back over the next ten years. So the jobs that were offered to me really wouldn't allow me to be better off than I am. I would have to pay back like \$430 a month for the next ten years.

I had wanted to be a high school teacher, but the cuts to education actually changed my decision to want to be a teacher. You have a situation where kids who need special help are being funneled

into the classrooms, and a teacher teaching thirty or forty students, three or four of whom need special attention; and one teacher with no helper trying to teach a complex subject and for me, I thought 'Why do I want to go through with that frustration?' Plus not getting ahead because I have this \$430 debt every month. So that was part of my decision to go on and get my masters and teach college where my income would go up and my debt would go up, but my ability to pay it off would be better.

So for people that are poor, who don't have a nest-egg, or money from your family to help you out,

you have to rely exclusively on student loans because I can't see anyone affording to get a degree on time while working full time. I do know some people that have been working on their degrees for like eight years and they're just starting the fourth year of their school because they've had to work so much.

What about differential tuition? Is charging law students \$14,000 a semester justifiable based on future earning?

I mean, what are you saying? You are not recruiting people from the DTES to take a business course. You're recruiting people

from British Properties. You're essentially saying 'These are vocations that we do not think are proper for people who come from poor families.' I mean, \$14,000 for Law? You cannot pay that much with a student loan. I get the maximum, which is \$7,300, so even my whole student loan barely pays half of the tuition.

First Nations have had difficulty hiring lawyers for that very reason. You don't want oppressed people with law degrees who have access to the legal mechanisms in Canada walking around, because of what has gone on and what is going on with residential schools and stolen land and all of that.

And I think that the same sort of attack is happening to the poor.

But I think that there's a window of opportunity that's opening right now between aboriginal people, poor people and the working class. All these groups that have been repressed, and we're all facing the same things. Exactly what you see in Haida Gwaii right now.

I mean you don't want people who are trying to make connections between disadvantaged groups having those positions. Most of us are aboriginal, poor or working class. That's over half the population.

Fire This Time Continues to Take Part in Broad Movement for Social Justice

By Shannon Bundock

In the past nine months Fire This Time has participated in many actions and events throughout the lower mainland, from mobilizations to educational forums and conferences to cultural and major speaking events.

This past August, Fire This Time members participated in the Under The Volcano Festival, where FTT member Mike Krebs sat on a panel discussion on imperialist war, and member Shannon Bundock spoke from the mainstage. As well, on September 13th FTT member Ivan Drury hosted a discussion on revolutionary politics at the anti-WTO Carnival in Vancouver.

Consistently Fire This Time has used these opportunities to introduce anti-imperialist politics and approach local issues from an internationalist perspective. Below are excerpts from two of these talks.

The first excerpt is a speech given by Shannon Bundock, the coordinator of Fire This Time, from the main stage at the Under The Volcano festival on August 10th. The second speech was given by Ivan Drury, an organizer of Fire This Time, at an anti-WTO carnival in Vancouver on September 13th.

Shannon Bundock

I was asked to say a few words on behalf of Fire This Time today and I'm going to speak from a perspective that many of us here share a significant and important commonality.

This, I believe, is a consciousness and understanding of our position as oppressed people under neo-liberalism and under imperialism,

from the federal government and the BC Liberals here at home to the imperialist attacks by US/UK and Canadian government abroad.

Right now the axis of working class resistance is in the countries that are being most heavily attacked by US imperialism. I would hope that everyone here today understands that their role, as oppressed and political people, is to fight alongside the heroic resistance of the people of Iraq: a resistance that is killing American soldiers daily and driving the US into a long and bitter war.

And this resistance is what unifies us with the people of Iraq, the people of Palestine, the people of Afghanistan, and all poor and working people in Canada and all poor and working people across the globe.

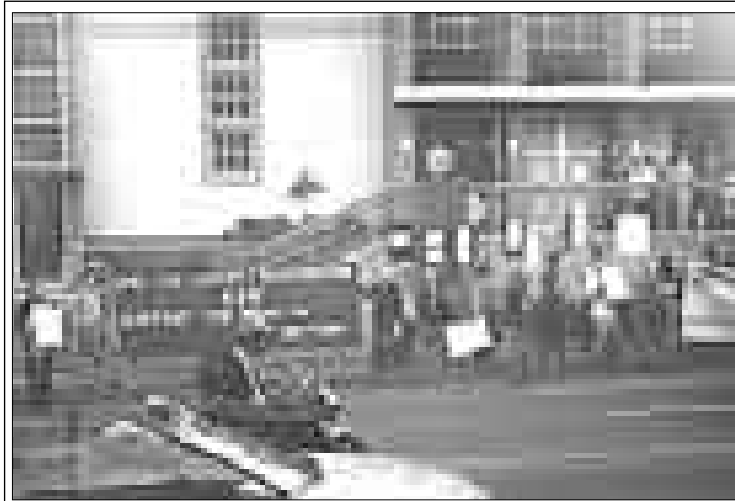
As we stand here, there are thousands of people engaged in a brave struggle of resistance against imperialist forces across the world. People fighting for liberation and people fighting for self-determination

And when we say that this will be a long war, that this war is not over, it is with the confidence that the Iraqi people will not allow the war to be over, not until the imperialists are defeated and driven out of Iraq.

The culture of resistance in Iraq, in Palestine, in Africa, in Latin America, in Cuba is one of heroic and immediate struggle. And as long as imperialism attacks us, this resistance must continue.

And as we recognize the shift that is being made into an era of all-out war and re-colonization of oppressed nations – the resistance will be forced to escalate.

The task for the coming



Protest against Israeli Minister of Immigration and Absorption Tzipi Livni's appearance in Vancouver, September 9th 2003.

showdown with imperialist countries necessitates political preparation. This practically and politically means building up through the masses.

And the imperialist program that is used to occupy and devastate Iraq is the same program used in Canada to crush Aboriginal sovereignty and deny the political, legal and human rights of indigenous nations.

We must oppose the attacks on Aboriginal people and support their struggle for sovereignty.

Concretely, we must oppose the First Nations Governance Act! We must oppose Sun Peaks in Skwelkwewelt! We must oppose Department of Fisheries and Oceans attacks on Cheam!

Here in Canada, here in BC again, we can see the extension of the international war in the war against refugees and immigrants. We can see these neo-liberal attacks in Bill C-18 (proposed Citizenship Act), in the Safe-third Country Agreement and the continued and escalated

detentions and deportations of people of colour from third world countries.

We now face the challenge of unifying against our enemies, unifying regardless of race, ethnic origin or citizenship – we are all under attack.

Expressly, we must build the power of oppressed people with masses of people in the streets. To do this we must fight as hard as we possibly can to ensure that any movement we build is a reflection of the reality of oppressed people in Vancouver, in BC, nationally and internationally.

Ivan Drury

It's not a matter of whether or not you're against this system that presides over us, against capitalism, against imperialism. It's a matter of how we approach and how we build towards anything at all. How we build a revolutionary movement here. The only thing that we can do right now is political preparation. And this means many, many, many things. Ultimately it means

educating people; ultimately that education means not only talking, not only distributing literature, but it means organizing demonstrations and bringing people together so that people can feel their power when they come together. So that people can understand that when they're standing in the streets with a million other people, that they have so much power that it cannot possibly ever be taken away from them.

The same power that people have felt throughout the world, the same power that people felt in Cuba. The power people felt in Russia, in China, in Vietnam, the same power people felt in Nicaragua, the same power people felt in Chile, everywhere in the world where there has been substantial change. Everywhere in the world that people have seized power, it's because they felt the power in the streets. And that organizing is extremely important in the political preparation work that we have to do.

We have to build these networks independently. And despite working with powerful organizations, with powerful labour, with powerful political organizations that are established and have money, we have to maintain independence ... we have to constantly agitate and fight within these coalitions, within this work, to agitate the minds, hearts and imaginations of everybody who is standing there with us. So that it is possible, when a single struggle is exhausted, for us to move on to the next one, and on and on and on.

Vladimir Mirabal Speech

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all the achievements that were made in these forty-four years.

For example, in 1958 in Santiago, the infant mortality rate was 60%. Now, it is less than 7%. How many doctors were there in 1958 in Santiago de Cuba, the second largest province in Cuba, medical doctors? 198. Today, 6100.

What was the budget for health care in 1958? 1.3 million pesos. Today, 181.7 million. 200 times more, minus inflation. Now, 95% of the population has access to health care – and in the mountains, because Santiago is a mountainous province – in the mountains it's 100%. Every house in the mountains has a medical doctor, a family doctor, nearby.

In 1958 illiteracy was above 35% in Santiago. Today, zero. In 1958 27% of children had schools, primary, secondary schools. Today, 100%. One university, Santiago had one university with 300 students, the University of Oriente. Today, four universities, 1700 students. And more than 50% of the housing was built after the revolution. More than 50%.

The Revolution Continues

So, we have the right to defend what we have done. And our people are willing to give their blood. And if someday there is a war in Cuba, then it's not going to be like the war in Iraq. The Cuban people are unique. The rebel blood is genetic, it's from the sixteenth century.

In a hundred years, we could be here to celebrate another anniversary of the Cuban revolution. I'm an example of that. I'm 31 years old, I'm the new wave, I'm the new generation that is taking over. Cuba now, there is a whole wave of new guys, men and women, prepared enough to continue the work of the revolution. To continue to be that beacon, that lighthouse for Latin America, for Africa, for the third world. Cuba has been, in the last forty-four years, a guiding light for the poorest of the world.

Because we stand, and we say things with the words they deserve, in front, face to face. And we do not have fear, because we believe in what we do.

So, don't worry, the new generation is guaranteed. And let's hope that, in 100 years, let's have a party celebrating the 150th anniversary of Moncada. (Applause)

Cuba Remains Under Attack

From page 15

co-defendants for protecting Cuba from those mercenaries who now, with their money and connections to the U.S. administration, sponsor schemes like [that of] one of the "dissidents" or the encouragement to illegal immigration from Cuba in order to justify the aggressive policy against Cuba.

The Cuban people has had no other option than to take their losses and to keep building the socialist society that too many have fought for, leaving it to history to make justice and relying on extreme patience and enormous courage. I don't know how many real progressive people are adhering to this campaign against Cuba, being things here so relative that somebody can be labeled as liberal just for eating a hamburger with the left hand and having grown used to see some on TV advertised as leftist just because they are a little to the left of George Wallace.

But I assume there must be some genuine progressive people among them; people who really care about human rights and who honestly believe in justice, [but are] misguided by a perverse media which leaves them without any other reference when it comes to know what happens around the world.

To this people I want to say this: Consider for a moment the awesome power accumulated by the U.S. imperialist government. Consider the enormous sense of impunity that right now can

be felt by this people who just accomplished a war of aggression defying the whole world [and] lying in front of everybody like nobody did before to justify it, creating a criminal and illegal doctrine of preemptive war, breaking any principle of international relations in the process and getting away with all of it.

Compare this overwhelming power with the little island of Cuba and it won't be hard to see how much damage this fascist establishment can inflict to my country with so little. I've always had the best of respect for the honest Americans who, overcoming the immense power of the most sophisticated machinery of deception ever designed, have been able to look beyond all of that to have a view of world events that pays homage to this country. It takes a lot of intelligence, curiosity, courage and, above all, a lot of sensitivity.

I want to appeal to that sensitivity and, with all my respect, invite you to think of this: One thing was to be a Roman citizen, with all privileges accorded to full citizenship, discussing democracy and liberty on the Senate or on the streets of Rome; and another thing, completely different, was to be fighting for that democracy and that liberty, in the field, against all odds, under the siege of Pompeii's legions, defending your very life together with Spartacus.

Very truly yours,

Rene González

Activities of the Youth-3rd World Alliance

From back page

create a strong base for outreach and engagement with people at the street level. One of these campaigns is the Free the Cuban Five Campaign. The Cuban Five are political prisoners in the US. They are serving time ranging from fifteen years to two life sentences for monitoring the activities of anti-Cuba terrorists. Since the Cuban revolution, Cuba has been attacked countless times from Miami including bombings of hotels, shootings, and a bomb planted on a Cubana Air flight. In the time they were living in Miami, monitoring the activities of these terrorists and reporting to the Cuban authorities they thwarted some 500 terrorist attacks. When Cuban authorities met with the FBI in Havana, they handed the FBI a five-volume document full of information about these terrorists, and the FBI promised a response within 90 days. Within a month the Cuban Five were arrested. They were tried in Miami and sentenced from 15 years to two life sentences. Their trial was politically based on the US government's close ties with these terrorist groups who serve their anti-Cuba interests. Y3WA demands that the Cuban Five be freed immediately.

Canadian ruling class has followed the US' example of adopting racist immigration legislation in the name of the war on terrorism. Attacks on refugees in the form of racial profiling and scapegoating are now national policy. An example of the Canadian government using their new legislation to completely control the fates of those seeking refuge and citizenship is the case of Bilquees Fatima and Imran Hussain. Bilquees is an elderly woman with serious health problems; she and her teenage

son Imran came to Canada from Pakistan, after her husband was murdered, to escape violent religious persecution. The Pakistani government will not protect them and even if Fatima survived the trip, they would certainly be killed were they to be deported to Pakistan. They have been recently released from detention, partly due to public pressure and the support of groups such as Y3WA who gathered more than 200 signatures in support of freeing them unconditionally. We oppose this blatantly racist attack on refugees and demand full citizenship for all asylum seekers.

Though membership requirements are in place, Y3WA remains an open political group and membership is not required to attend meetings. For the antiwar movement to continue forward it must grow and become diverse and militant. Y3WA has taken on the task of active recruitment, playing a major role in outreach activities of the local antiwar coalition, Stopwar.ca, and emphasizing for those who have not previously been involved that any effort that can be put forth toward educating and mobilizing the masses, especially that of youth and students is vital. We encourage all to get involved. It is imperative to our strength that we create a broader base of consciousness and understanding within the larger community, in particular with people of colour, third world and youth. In the lower mainland and British Columbia, we need to effectively outreach and mobilize more people against imperialist war and occupation abroad and its continuation at home. Join us in this important struggle!

Kira Koshelanyk is a member of the Youth-3rd World Alliance.

Youth-3rd World Alliance Basis of Unity

Brief History:

The Youth 3rd World Alliance (Y3WA) is an organization of groups and individuals which formed during the US-led bombing of Iraq in April 2003. Y3WA is composed of young people and people of the 3rd World who are dedicated to organizing an effective opposition against imperialist war and occupation.

Points of Agreement:

We stand against imperialism and all forms of imperialist aggression including war, occupation and colonization. Self-determination for oppressed nations is the strongest weapon against imperialism and oppressed people in oppressed nations are the strongest force to realize

and wield self-determination. We support and fight for the self-determination of all oppressed nations, including the self-determination of the indigenous nations in Canada.

The Youth 3rd World Alliance's mandate is:

1) to ensure the political and structural inclusion of young people, third world people and other marginalized voices in the anti-war and anti-imperialist movement and its leadership.

2) a commitment to building a mass movement as well as encouraging and exploiting the energy and momentum of the movement. This means accommodating/initiating appropriately frequent and dynamic actions with an emphasis on popular education

of all means. This includes, but is not limited to, the production and distribution of literature, discussion forums and the realization of the educational potential of mass action. To build a movement against imperialist aggression, these actions must be carried out by any means necessary, as each specific situation requires.

3) to build a broad, inclusive and dynamic anti-war and anti-imperialism movement that fights to overcome all forms of oppression. Accordingly, we do not tolerate behaviour that perpetuates the systemic and/or individualized oppression that undermines the unity of all oppressed, poor and working people.



Antiwar rally in Seoul, South Korea, September 27th 2003.

Movimiento Fire This Time Por Justicia Social - Bases de Unidad

La humanidad es amenazada hoy por guerra, crisis económicas, el hambre, la pobreza y el crimen: todos creados por el impulso capitalista por maximizar sus beneficios a expensas de la gente del mundo. Para oponernos a cada uno de estos crímenes contra la humanidad, debemos enfocar todo nuestro trabajo y acción para construir los cimientos para avanzar nuestros intereses en una amplia lucha contra el capital internacional, sus herramientas de división de la clase obrera y sus instituciones locales. El principio fundamental del Movimiento Fire This Time por Justicia Social es la unidad y la solidaridad activa de todos los pobres y gente de trabajo, local e internacionalmente. Debemos reconocer que este principio no tendría sentido sin una lucha activa porque la búsqueda de este principio es agudamente contraria al interés de la clase predominante, los cuales utilizarán todos los medios a su

disposición para mantenernos divididos y hostiles entre nosotros mismos.

Fire This Time es una organización política basada en la acción y comprometida a construir poder social y político de la gente pobre y de trabajo en British Columbia. Creemos que la única manera de desafiar con eficacia y amenazar al gobierno y su agenda corporativa es con la organización de masas de gente activa en lugares de trabajo y en las calles. Estamos dedicados a movilizar y a unificar a gente pobre y de trabajo contra el Gobierno Liberal, sus legislaciones y políticas en contra de los pobres y trabajadores. Estamos comprometidos a organizar con trabajadores y gente pobre de las comunidades más atacadas y explotadas del Lower Mainland y más allá: comunidades de gente de color, inmigrantes, refugiados, "illegales", trabajadores de bajo-salario, gente lisiada, homosexuales, comunidades indígenas, gente

desempleada y familias de bajos ingresos. Nos oponemos a todas las formas de opresión y de explotación: desde sexismo al racismo, de la homofobia al colonialismo y a el resto de instituciones, de pensamiento, de creencia, de acciones y de los comportamientos que humille y degrade a gente para crear hostilidad y división entre nosotros.

La meta del Movimiento Fire This Time por Justicia Social es construir un amplio movimiento de base para derrotar al gobierno Liberal de BC. Nuestro trabajo es proporcionar las herramientas necesarias para unificar y para activar a la clase obrera en BC., para construir un movimiento amplio de base, fuerte y eficaz para oponernos a los Liberales de BC. y sus ataques contra la gente pobre y trabajadores. Este movimiento debe ser integrado en el contexto revolucionario más amplio de la lucha internacional contra el capitalismo e imperialismo; aunque nos

enfoquemos principalmente en política local, esencialmente el alcance de nuestro trabajo es internacionalista. El apoyo a las luchas de la gente opresa en otros países debilita la hegemonía y el poder de la clase capitalista en otras tierras y por lo tanto debilita su mando local, ayudando así en las batallas de la gente opresa en Canadá. Además, la práctica de la solidaridad internacional solidifica la cooperación, esencial en la construcción de un movimiento del mundo por justicia social. La agenda del Gobierno Liberal es parte de un programa de reestructuración global conocido como neo-liberalismo. Luchar a los Liberales de BC. es luchar contra el neo-liberalismo y capitalismo global. Debemos ampliarnos en esto, implícita y explícitamente para hacer las conexiones relevantes a nuestras domésticas luchas diarias, para superar la división geográfica, y dejar en claro que cuando participamos en la lucha, no luchamos solos, sino

junto a millones de trabajadores y de gente pobre alrededor del mundo. En la globalización capitalista - imperialista no hay lucha local que no tenga un carácter internacional. Cada internacional es local y cada local es internacional.

El Movimiento Fire This Time por Justicia Social apoyará y trabajará con otros movimientos y luchas progresivas ya sea por demandas inmediatas o a largo plazo, localmente, nacionalmente e internacionalmente. Nuestra meta principal es abolir la pobreza e injusticia por medio de educación, participación y acción directa. Intentamos alcanzar un nivel colectivo de conciencia que permita a la gente oprimida, pensar socialmente y actuar políticamente para alcanzar justicia social por cualesquiera sean los medios necesarios.

- Translated by Claudio Ekdahl

Student Youth Committee in Action!

By Nicole Burton

This fall, imperialist aggression is intensifying in its transition from war to occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan, finalizing its complete disregard for the peoples of those regions and their right to self-determination. Although resistance within these occupied territories (including Palestine) continues to grow strongly, the global anti-war movement is growing slowly compared with its explosive activity in the spring.

Despite this apparent confusion in the global anti-war movement after the occupation of Iraq in answering the main question of how to respond effectively to the military occupation, students and youth are moving to the forefront of the anti-war movement, combating imperialist war and occupation.

It is not surprising when internationally, students and youth could be seen in March as the organizers of immediate mass mobilizations around high schools, college campuses, and a variety of student/youth-based organizations. It was then that both the general public and the rest of the anti-war movement saw the capabilities of a youth leadership and commitment against war – whether through walkouts, strikes, or youth-organized rallies and conferences – in addition to a growing majority of students and youth recognizing the changing pattern of US warfare: that of pre-emptive war, perpetual war, state and military terrorism across the globe through actions that were undeniably imperialist in nature.

This trend can be seen in the Vancouver anti-war movement as well, and the student/youth involvement within the Lower Mainland. During the month of September, ten campuses were visited by members of the Stopwar.ca coalition in what was organized as a Students Week Against War. Through tabling, forums, and intense discussion around the issue of war and occupation (focusing on Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan), networks were made with a number of student unions and already existing campus groups. Over 120 individual students signed up to form a cross-campus Student Committee. This demand was met on Thursday, September 25th at Langara college with the creation of a Student Youth Committee within the Stopwar.ca coalition.

Individuals representing Langara, UBC, Kwantlen, Douglas, and VanTech High School drew up the following Points of Agreement:

- The Student Youth Committee (SYC) will:
- Take on work that will build concrete connections with students and youth.
 - Promote a student/youth voice within Stopwar.ca and the anti-war movement.
 - Encourage the formation of independent groups that organize in their communities, and form connections with them.
 - Direct work towards areas where students and youth don't have an outlet to organize.
 - Eventually organize student groups nationally.

With this mandate set, the meeting moved to vote upon the direction of the committee's short-term goals. It was decided that the focus of the SYC for the month of October is on the organization of forums across Lower Mainland campuses, educating and mobilizing on the issues of war, occupation, and self-determination, with a callout for the next international day of action, October 25th, and publicizing for a Vancouver-specific event in November, a youth-based conference under the banner of 'Youth Against Occupation.'

As this group grows rapidly to include more and more of the already present anti-war population among Vancouver's young people, revitalizing the thousands-strong movement of anti-war students and youth seen in the spring, our demands will be clear: Voice and leadership for youth and students in the anti-war movement here and internationally; Voice and leadership for youth in occupied countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine; Self-determination! End the Occupations!

Our next meeting will be held on Thursday, October 9th, location and time to be announced. Please see the events section below or visit groups.yahoo.com/group/stopwarstudents_van on the web for further information.

Nicole Burton sits on the Stopwar.ca Coordinating Committee as representative of the Student Youth Committee.

Youth-Third World Alliance Makes History! Join Us!

By Kira Koshelanyk

One of the most significant outcomes of the global antiwar movement has been the formation of new organizations of young and third world activists. One such group, which took up the task of creating more representation for the young and third world populations in the city, is the Youth-Third World Alliance (Y3WA). This group formed in April of 2003 out of necessity, composed of experienced young and third world activists and those who were only just beginning to become involved. On April 5th we called a successful rally and march against the invasion of Iraq, seeing upwards of 700 people take to the streets.

Y3WA seeks to expand the consciousness raised in recent months by continuing to build the confidence and unity of all oppressed people, especially youth and third world people, through education and direct action in order to oppose imperialist aggression whether here at home or abroad. Y3WA conducts regular discussion classes based on readings brought to the group by members for discussion. Without action, education lacks purpose; no revolutionary movement could be built without revolutionary ideas.

Y3WA is engaging in various actions and campaigns, which test our political analysis and

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Free the Cuban Five Committee Public Meeting!

Thursday October 9th
At 6:30 PM
239 E. Georgia St.
Vancouver
For more information call (604) 831-9821 or (604) 322-1764, or email cuban5_van@yahoo.com.

CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES Workshop on Trafficking in Women and Girls

Saturday, October 11th
9:00 AM to 4:30 PM
8680 Hudson St, Vancouver
(Corner of 71st and Hudson - St. Augustine Hall)
Lunch will be provided.
Please contact one of the representatives indicated below as soon as possible to confirm your participation and to ask any questions about the meeting.
For more information call 604-254-9626, visit www.trafficking.ca, or email debisaacs@yahoo.com.

Indigenous Peoples' Day 9th Annual Rally for Unity In Support of Leonard Peltier

Sunday October 12th at 1 PM
Peace Arch Border Crossing
Potluck Dinner at 5-7 PM at Peace Arch
Caravan/Carpool from Vancouver to border: Gather at 11 AM at Grandview Park (1200 Block of Commercial Drive)

For info on car-pool: 604-322-7934
For info on rally: 604-254-7248

Native Youth Movement Salmon BBQ

Featuring speakers and Spoken word
Monday October 13th
12-4 PM
Grandview Park
(1200 Block of Commercial Drive)
Vancouver
For more info email nymchapter604@hotmail.com.

Latin America's 'People Power'

Public Forum
Featuring MC Blanca Flor Bonilla, FMLN El Salvador
Friday October 17th at 7 PM
IWA Hall (2859 Commercial Drive)
Vancouver
Free admission. For more info email info@fmln.ca.

Media Democracy Day presents 'Veterans of the Vancouver Sun'

Saturday October 18th
11 AM to 8 PM
Vancouver Public Library
(Central branch, 350 W. Georgia)
Free Admission.
Organized by the Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom.
For more information call 604-602-1204.

Landless Workers Movement Coordinator João Pedro Stédile Speaking Tour

Tuesday October 21st at 7 PM
Vancouver Downtown Library
(1st floor room)

'Love, Politics, and Rebelliousness' A film on the life of Che Guevara

Friday October 24th at 6:30 PM
SFU Harbour Centre
515 West Hastings, Room 1800
Suggested donation: \$5.
For more information email brigade@vcn.bc.ca.

OCCUPATION IS THE ISSUE! THE WAR IS NOT OVER!

Support is building a series of events in the occupational day. Please see the website and the program for complete information and a full listing of events. The program committee of the event is the youth group.

Oct. 25 International Day of Action
1 PM at Vancouver Art Gallery

Free Public Forums

SURREY:
Whalley Public Library 6pm
Public Meeting Room
10347 - 136th St.
Wednesday
Oct 8

BURNABY:
Bonsor Rec. Complex 7:30pm
MultiPurpose Room 1
6850 Bonsor Ave.
Tuesday
Oct 14

RICHMOND:
Time and Location to be announced!
Thursday
Oct 23

Bring the Troops Home! End the Occupations!

A series of antiwar forums organized by the Stopwar.ca Student and Youth Committee

Oct 16th from 11am to 1 PM
Richmond Kwantlen Campus
Student Lounge

There will be more antiwar forums in October on different campuses throughout the Lower Mainland. Please visit groups.yahoo.com/group/stopwarstudents_van on the web for further information, or visit www.stopwar.ca.

[www stopwar ca](http://www.stopwar.ca)

why ISRAEL is an oppressive apartheid state

End the Occupation! Self-Determination!
Organized by Youth - 3rd World Alliance