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Socialist Voice #470, February 2, 2011

## **How Can We Defend Communities in Struggle?**

**By John Riddell**

The debates following the G20 protests in Toronto last June have raised important questions about how activists can defend and expand arenas of resistance to capitalism, at a time when the system's power seems overwhelming. Several articles in the latest issue of *Upping the Anti*, a leading journal of anti-capitalist thought offer an opportunity to discuss this question on a broader basis.

*Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action (UTA)*, which is published twice a year in Toronto, offers a stimulating mix of anarchist and Marxist viewpoints on important issues. Issue #11, published in November 2010, is no exception.

### **Indigenous struggles: defending the land**

A short piece in this issue by *UTA* co-editor Tom Keefer makes a profound point regarding indigenous struggles. Responding to a letter from Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, well-known in the mainstream media for their book-length polemic against Indigenous sovereign rights,[1] Keefer notes that "Indigenous struggles remain one of the primary barriers to capitalist development in great swaths of the country." Where Widdowson and Howard urge that this barrier be dismantled, Keefer views it as a starting point for progressive struggles.

"Indigenous peoples and anti-capitalist activists have common ground for a struggle against the commodification of land and labour," says Keefer. "Marxists should not rule out the possibility that these struggles could point towards the evolution of non-capitalistic social practices in the here and now." (p. 27)

Keefer's views on this topic are more fully developed in *UTA #10* ("Marxism and Indigenous Struggles") and *UTA #7* ("Six Nations, Direct Action, and the Struggle in Brantford").

In Keefer's view, the potential for "non-capitalistic social practices" arises from a social foundation: namely the absence of private property in land on Native reserves. His account of the Six Nations struggle demonstrates another factor: surviving traditions of collective community defence.

### **'Special Diet' campaign**

A different type of community defence is discussed in *UTA #11* with reference to the work of two Toronto social movements, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) and No One Is Illegal-Toronto (NOII).

A survey by OCAP organizer John Clarke of the last ten years of OCAP activity focuses on an imaginative effort to combat hunger among recipients of social assistance. The drastic cuts in Ontario's social assistance payments in the 1990s left a loophole: a provision for cash supplement, called the Special Diet, which was available to recipients who had a diagnosed medical condition requiring that they consume an adequate diet. "We promoted knowledge of the benefit and won the co-operation of medical providers, who worked with us to hold 'hunger clinics,'" says Clarke.

"It has been, very literally, a fight all along," Clarke notes. Government resistance was intense. Last year it abolished the Special Diet provision, but only after millions of dollars had been won for poor people. While it lasted, the Special Diet campaign created a tiny refuge of solidarity against one aspect of capitalism's inhumanity.

### **Sanctuary/Solidarity City**

Another type of community in struggle is discussed in a round-table among prominent activists in NOII-Toronto's campaign assure that non-documented immigrants obtain secure access to all city services. The Sanctuary/Solidarity City effort is an extension of the Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) campaign in the U.S., which has won ordinances in several cities barring the use of city resources, including police, to enforce immigration policy.

In Toronto, NOII persuaded the District School Board to adopt a DADT policy, protecting non-documented students from entrapment or victimization on the grounds of their immigration status. Getting this policy implemented at the school level has been a struggle, NOII activist Farrah Miranda reports, but "in September 2010, we were able to get every school in the city to put up a poster welcoming students without full status."

### **Mobilizing the G20 protests**

The building of a community of quite a different sort is taken up in Lesley Wood's article in the same issue, "Bringing Together the Grassroots: A Strategy and a Story from Toronto's G20 Protests." Wood's account begins with a critique of previous summit protests, "exciting events" that "often left local organizations facing criminal charges, non-association conditions, local hostility, and financial ruin." [2] By contrast, organizers at the Toronto summit sought an

emphasis on “local organizing, anti-oppression politics, and coalition building”; their goal was to “strengthen long-term campaigns.”

Supporters of this strategy – or story,[3] as Wood calls it – united in the Toronto Community Mobilization Network (TCMN), aiming to mobilize a broad range of organizations for an entire week of action. Consistent with the local-organizing focus, “no invitation to participate was extended to people in other cities.”[4] However, “our story had unintended consequences,” Wood says. Many who were attracted to the project had goals different from the TCMN vision. The TCMN story “reactivated a division between a grassroots, marginalized identity engaged in community organizing and a white, young, militant, ‘anti-capitalist’ identity and strategy,” Woods tells us. “At no point did we strategize ... about how to disrupt [the G20] without undermining our other goal of remaining welcoming to as many participants as possible.”

Wood also identifies other constituencies that were not encompassed by either the “community-organizing” or “militant anti-capitalist” stories represented in the TCMN. “The story we told did not resonate with immigrant organizations working on issues in their home countries,” groups that had been prominent in Toronto street protests during the previous years. Moreover, “the story we told largely excluded the labour movement,” a central organizer of the June 26, 2010, anti-G20 mass action.

Wood’s account touches on a general challenge of working-class political organizing. Any broad movement contains a multiplicity of forces, each with a distinctive “story.” The movement’s task is to unite these forces in a common intent, a common agenda. Wood’s article makes clear that this was not achieved by the G20 protest organizers.

### **The People’s Summit**

Nonetheless, the G20 protest movement succeeded in creating a shared space of discussion and protest that was truly impressive. Wood does not discuss this experience, but its character sustains her analysis. A week of protest, called the People’s Summit, included a wide range of organizations, viewpoints, and forms of activity, including many street actions, and leading up to a mass march. In the teeth of fierce police pressure, the movement created a community, analogous to those described in the other articles discussed here.

As we know, the community came under attack. It was disrupted by a rampage of police brutality, mistreatment, more than a thousand arbitrary arrests, and hundreds of unjustified criminal charges. Clearly, another “story” was at work here – trumpeted by the mass media during the G20 preparations. This story told of a city and a summit menaced by supposed terrorists and extremist hooligans, a city that therefore had to be protected by a mobilization of tens of thousands of cops and a budget of more than \$1 billion for “security” costs. For most of the population at large, this was the *main* story, indeed the *only* story they heard.

Despite vigorous protests, the police were able to act out their story, leaving anti-capitalist movements facing the same burdens that Wood perceives in the outcome of previous summits: many activists paralyzed by detention or non-association conditions, legal costs running into six figures, and widespread public hostility.

Wood does not discuss the police story or how it worked out. But surely this had to be a central consideration in strategic discussion both before and after the G20. How was the People's Summit and the G20 protests in general to be defended against the state's repressive onslaught?

### **The Black Bloc story**

The editorial of *UTA #11* also takes up the G20 events and also raises the issue of defence – although in quite another context.

The article, entitled “Behind the Mask: Violence and Representational Politics,” does not mention the TCMN, the People's Summit, sustainable community organizing, the cop rampage, or any of the stories cited in Wood's account. Instead, it tells the story of the Black Bloc – something Wood does not mention.

As the *UTA* editors see it, “three social forces – the capitalist state, the social democratic left, and the small but active radical left – contended with each other” during the anti-G20 protests. Events were “defined by two controversial violences: that of the state's Integrated Security Unit (ISU) and that of the Black Bloc.”

The editors set down basic facts regarding the Black Bloc contingent. The contingent moved away from the main march and the police presence; individuals within it “targeted several unguarded stores,” “smashed windows,” and “set fire to police cars.” The contingent then rejoined the main body of protesters in the “designated protest zone” at Queen's Park. Police surrounded the protected zone and “began conducting mass arrests of activists regardless of whether or not they were with the bloc. Police continued to make mass arrests throughout the weekend.”

The Black Bloc is anonymous and mute. It makes no demands and does not state its intentions, leaving us all to draw our own conclusions. Yet according to the *UTA* editors, “Its very presence called into question the state's monopoly on the use of force.” It is “a body that does not recognize the sovereignty of the state and, as such, is capable of progressing along the continuum from politics to war.”

Bold words indeed. Many in the Black Bloc are doubtless motivated by legitimate anger and revolutionary aspirations, but still, the progression from window breaking to war is quite a leap.

### **Educational purpose**

Elsewhere, the editors interpret the Black Bloc's purpose in terms of education. The Bloc reveals “that the realization of ‘another world’ requires that we come to terms with the violence underlying every political act,” they say. Does this mean that every act of anti-capitalist resistance is in some sense violent? If so, it turns reality on its head. The underlying violence in our society is that of the state, which utilizes repression to enforce exploitation and rein in anti-capitalist movements. To come to terms with this violence, we must show that it is caused by capitalist oppression, not by the people's resistance, and we find effective ways to counter it.

How was the gathered community of anti-G20 protesters to be protected against the outrageous limitations on freedom of movement in downtown Toronto, the threat of police attack, and the

arbitrary arrests, which had already started even before the June 26 mass march? Was Black Bloc property destruction on June 26 an appropriate response to the cop mobilization and the arrests? The *UTA* editorial does not take up these questions.

Regarding the Black Bloc episode, the editorial states that “such an illumination is pedagogically important” and must be “presented in contexts where large numbers gather on the basis of shared hostility to bourgeois ‘politics.’” At its best, the Black Bloc model of “illumination” fails to engage broader forces as protagonists, reducing them to the role of spectators.

However, as the editorial concedes, “the moment of illumination is traumatic.” In the G20 action the Black Bloc action was imposed on the demonstration as a whole without consent, bringing with it heightened physical danger and, for many, arrest and police mistreatment. The Black Bloc acted with authoritarian disregard for the goals of the mass of demonstrators.

In the *UTA* editors’ view, governmental organizers of the cop mobilization faced a dilemma. “But what threat could they cite to justify such dramatic expenditures and violations of legal norms?” they ask. Further, “In the absence of organized worker resistance, the ISU operation seems absurd in its disproportion.” We can safely assume that the police strategists wished to test their new tactics and weaponry regardless, by bloodying the demonstrators. But their repressive violence needed a pretext, a “story” that could be sold to a public that believes in civil liberties and democratic rights.

Although this pretext could have been provided through disruptive actions by undercover agents, such provocations are chancy and risk exposure.[5] How convenient for the police that the pretext was provided by a small group among the protesters. I would question any imputation that Black Bloc participants intended to put fellow protesters in harm’s way. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that their actions made it much easier and less costly for the police to carry out their rampage.

While defending the Black Bloc action, the editorial also suggests that future initiatives might take another form. It quotes approvingly an anarchist commentator at Infoshop.org who proposes that “the next convergence of anarchist forces” not be seen “as a theatre where the same routine can be played out again.” It regrets the absence at the G20 of non-violent civil disobedience, which “constantly seeps outside the representational framework of bourgeois politics” and thus has merit as “implicit violence.” The term “violence” seems here to mean no more than defiance of bourgeois legality.

Let us hope that forces that supported the G20 Black Bloc episode succeed in adopting more constructive tactics in the future.

### **The role of defence guards**

The *UTA* editors also list a number of historic experiences with groups providing an “extrinsic reference” that they say is similar to Black Bloc: three examples of defence activities during the Black civil rights struggle in the U.S. (Deacons for Defense and Justice, the Fruit of Islam, and the Black Panther Party) and two from recent Indigenous struggles in Canada.

All these examples concern defence guards, whose purpose was to deter and fend off attacks by the state or right-wing forces and to protect oppressed communities or progressive movements. Such bodies are formed frequently; I myself have participated in several. They can be seen now, in embryo, at threatened Toronto meetings or demonstrations.

Guard duty is only a small, if central, part of such efforts. The heart of defence strategy lies in rallying opposition to the violence of the police and rightists, in demonstrating how the threatened community or movement is seeking to affirm the goals of freedom, democracy, and human rights that all victims of capitalism hold dear.

### **Instructive examples**

The Six Nations struggle described by Keefer in *UTA #7* provided a graphic example of how such a defence effort can stymie police violence. The moral authority of Six Nations Indigenous activists was so great that occupied lands could be defended with minimal use of force. “Six Nations has always occupied building sites peacefully and without using weapons,” Keefer reports. On one occasion, when cops invaded Indigenous land, “unarmed Six Nations community members physically drove off several dozen police officers armed with automatic rifles, tear gas grenades, pepper spray, and tasers.”

As I write, Egypt is in the grip of a people’s insurrectionary movement. Mass demonstrations took place aiming to overthrow of a brutal dictatorship and win democratic rights for the population. When attacked, the demonstrators found ways to resist and drove back the police. Protesters formed defence guards to prevent looting and property destruction. They forged bonds of solidarity with rank-and-file soldiers. It is not yet clear whether this movement will win or lose, but it has already made its mark in world history.

Conditions in Canada are far removed from those of Egypt. Yet whatever the fate of the mass movement there, it shows an effective approach to the challenge of state violence, aimed at rallying the immense majority in defence of human rights and avoiding needless provocations, while isolating and pushing back the forces of repression.

The Black Bloc, by contrast, did not rally broad forces around commonly shared democratic goals, did not challenge the cops’ trampling of democratic rights, and did not serve to defend the protesters against the G20 summit.

### **Community defence**

As Leslie Wood’s account shows, the G20 protests involved the creation of a community in struggle, one that was expressed in the People’s Summit, the mass June 26 protest, the limited attempts to disrupt the summit, and the subsequent anti-repression protests. This community was menaced by state violence. It needed and deserved to be defended by a united effort of all participants.

The Six Nations, OCAP, and NOII articles in *UTA* describe militant efforts to defend such communities. The same approach is needed in drawing a balance sheet of the June 2010 G20 confrontation.

During the nine months after the G20 protests, a great deal has been achieved in discrediting the police and challenging their violations of human rights. Continued defence efforts are urgently needed on behalf of the many activists threatened with serious charges and to help build the support for political rights needed to carry out future mass mobilizations with success.

*To donate to G20 legal defence fund, visit the Community Solidarity Network fundraising page at <http://www.g20.torontomobilize.org/node/509> For further discussion and for references to other articles on the G20 experience, see *Socialist Voice*, September 22, 2010. *Upping The Anti* is available in hardcopy format for \$20/year (Canada); individual articles can be downloaded for \$0.99 each. Go to [www.uppingtheanti.org](http://www.uppingtheanti.org).*

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## **Notes**

[1]. Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation*, McGill-Queen's U.P., 2008

[2]. A “non-association condition” is a bail provision that bars the accused from meeting or communicating with named individuals and organizations.

[3]. Wood's use of the term “story” follow a current of radical thought – she cites Eric Selbin and Charles Tilly – which stresses that “the stories organizers tell deeply influence the way that organizing takes place.”

[4]. Many protesters did in fact come from outside Toronto and were welcomed into the anti-G20 activities.

[5]. An attempt by disguised police officers to unleash violence at the 2007 Montebello summit protest was exposed and widely ridiculed; see [www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2007/08/23/police-montebello.html](http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2007/08/23/police-montebello.html).

Socialist Voice #471, February 6, 2011

## **The Struggle in Egypt Surges Ahead**

**by Ahmed Shawki**

*The revolutionary uprising in Egypt marks a major turn in the world struggle for political and social liberation. In this article, International Socialist Review editor Ahmed Shawki reports from Cairo on the mass demonstrations for democratic rights that shifted the balance away from the violence of the regime. Transcription by Matthew Beamesderfer.*

[*Socialist Worker* (U.S.), February 4, 2011] – Anti-Mubarak demonstrators gathered in the hundreds of thousands on Friday, in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, in Alexandria and in cities and towns across the country for a new day of mass protest against the regime.

In my estimation, the Tahrir Square demonstration was even bigger today than it was last Tuesday, when across Egypt, between 6 million and 8 million people protested, according to estimates. As the hour for curfew came and went tonight, thousands of people were still arriving to demonstrate. In Alexandria, an estimated 1 million people also turned out.

Everywhere, people were united around the slogan that Mubarak must go now. In Tahrir Square, there was an echo of the old civil rights slogan in the U.S. “We shall not be moved”—hundreds of thousands of people were chanting, “He should go! We will not move.” Then there was my favorite slogan of the day: “Ya Mubarak, sahi el noum, inaharda akher youm!” It sounds better in Arabic because it rhymes, but it translates roughly into English as: “Wakey, wakey, Mubarak, today is the last day!”

To understand the importance of today’s massive turnout, you only have to remember what happened on Wednesday and Thursday, which can only be described as the unleashing of the hounds of hell—thugs of the regime sent out in a coordinated assault on the demonstrators at Tahrir Square and the whole of the pro-democracy movement.

The scale of violence was seen by millions of people around the world. They threw rocks and Molotov cocktails, and they wielded knives and all kinds of other weapons in an attempt to intimidate, injure and drive out the demonstrators from Tahrir Square.

They also made a particular point to beat up journalists and drive them out of the square, and they raided hotels where news organizations like Al Jazeera and CNN were headquartered, trashing their operations. They also attempted to incite fear against foreigners—anything that would drive a wedge among the demonstrators and that would intimidate people from coming out on Friday.

The violence was so bad that Omar Suleiman—the newly appointed vice president, whose previous position was head of the army intelligence services, someone who must have overseen the arrest and torture of thousands in that post—came on television last night to deny any involvement on the part of the National Democratic Party, Mubarak’s ruling party.

Suleiman claimed that no one had any idea who organized the onslaught—despite the fact that several of the thugs were captured, and their police or government employment IDs were shown in the media. So the hollowness of his claims weren't lost on the Egyptian people.

There was even a moment of bizarre other-worldliness when Suleiman—this organizer of repression and torture—appealed for prisoners, who according to many reports had been released from jail by the regime's thugs to help in the violence, to show up at the prisons again and turn themselves in.

That's the context of today's demonstrations—after two days of systematic violence against the anti-Mubarak protestors, people turned out in the hundreds of thousands today, and it turned the balance back again in the favor of the demonstrators.

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As in every revolutionary situation, there has been a dramatic ebb and flow to the events in Egypt.

The demonstrations began on January 25—ironically, on “Police Day,” which was previously a celebration of the regime's strength. On that first day, the movement broke through a kind of psychological barrier by moving into the streets in huge numbers, something that didn't happen under the Egyptian police state.

The demonstrations continued through last Friday, when there were huge battles with the police that pushed the security forces off the streets. The government's response was to deploy the army, which is seen as “above politics”—but to allow Cairo to descend into a kind of chaos, with gangs of thugs roaming through neighborhoods, many of them organized by the regime. The mass of Egyptians responded to this by organizing neighborhood defense committees to protect the people.

Last Tuesday, the demonstrations were the biggest yet. Mubarak spoke on television that night, declaring that he wouldn't run for re-election, but had no intention of stepping down. The thugs were unleashed the next day to show what Mubarak had in mind as a transition.

But Friday represents a new stage following the two days of violence that came before it. In the preceding two days, not only was the anti-Mubarak demonstration in Tahrir maintained—that is, the heart of the uprising and its best-known expression was defended from forces determined to drive the protesters out—but the manner of its defense produced a response in support of it that could be seen throughout the day today.

Early on Friday morning, there were literally thousands of people lined up to go into the square. The army had taken up positions after the two days of sustained violence, not wanting to appear helpless, but what was phenomenal was that it wasn't the army guarding the entrances, but lines and lines of stewards from the demonstration. They searched people as they came in, making sure no one had the kind of weapons that the pro-government gangs had used against them. I've never been frisked so often, and with as many apologies for being frisked.

The army is continuing to maintain its role as a force supposedly above politics. Unlike the last two days of uncontrolled violence against the protesters, which the army didn't intervene decisively to stop, today, it helped create a buffer zone around Tahrir Square. So once the attack on Tahrir Square failed, there was barbed wire and tanks in all the pivotal positions around Cairo.

I got to Tahrir in the morning, before the end of prayers, when even larger numbers came to the demonstration. But already, the crowd numbered half a million, if not more, by my estimate.

Once inside Tahrir, you could see a level of organization and solidarity unlike anything I've seen before.

The first thing that struck me was the makeshift clinics set up all over the place, with dozens and dozens of nurses and doctors—many of whom said they were unemployed—stitching up people's legs or arms or faces. These injuries were the result of the pro-government thugs—there were dozens of people walking around who had been patched up.

In addition to that, people had brought medical supplies with them. Others were circulating through the square with bags of bread, with water, with candy.

One of the aims of the pro-Mubarak forces had been to drive out all journalists—they focused in particular on foreign journalists to try to raise anger at a supposed foreign plot against Egypt. So it was good to see that journalists were operating freely and quite welcome in the crowd.

Probably the most significant sign of the health of the protest was the continued political discussion and debate within the square. I also saw dozens and dozens of people who were calling friends and relatives, and encouraging them to come to the square—trying to convince them of the fallacy of the government's claims about chaos and violence.

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According to press reports, the U.S. government is lobbying hard to get officials around Mubarak to pressure him to step down.

The U.S. maneuvers around this question must, as always, be taken with a grain of salt. No one will say it in the mainstream media, but Obama could have held a press conference in which he simply declared that aid to Egypt is cut off, that this kind of violence will not be tolerated, and that the U.S. now stands squarely with the protesters.

But of course, he won't say that because that's not how diplomacy works. And the reason it doesn't work that way is you can't send that signal about a dictator the U.S. has been supporting for 30 years. Not because Mubarak isn't finished, but because of how his downfall on those terms would affect other relationships and the whole Middle East.

So the U.S. is scrambling to find an alternative, and there are plenty of options. Amr Moussa, the head of the Arab League, showed up to the demonstration today to be among the protesters. He's clearly thrown his hat in the ring to be the next president. There's also Mohamed ElBaradai. There's the Muslim Brotherhood. Even the current defense minister, Mohammed Hussein

Tantawi, made the rounds through Tahrir Square today, under protection of soldiers, without much opposition to him.

But there are still plenty of difficulties and contradictions for the U.S. and for the rulers in Egypt, because there are significant problems from trying to gently step back from a military dictatorship.

Egypt is still that, in many respects. I should add that a couple offices of human rights and labor organizations were raided yesterday and closed down. It's still very gingerly that people produce any public literature that's against the regime. So it was quite an exercise, for example, to get leaflets into Tahrir Square today.

One problem for the U.S. is that Omar Suleiman figures prominently in their plans for a post-Mubarak transition. Many of the demonstrators were dismayed by Suleiman's speech last night. But of course, most know the history of the man—that he was involved integrally in the repression that took place under Mubarak's regime.

In general, most demonstrators still agree that their central demand is for the removal of Mubarak. That's not to say that the rest of the regime should get off scot-free. But Mubarak's downfall is what the movement has focused on so far, and when that's accomplished, that significant victory will then open the process.

My own view is that it's virtually impossible to imagine the departure of Mubarak without the cabinet and the government he's put into place then becoming the central question for the movement. That's the underlying dynamic.

Mubarak is the lightning rod that has brought all the forces together. Those forces don't necessarily agree on the same outcome, but they're at least agreed on the central necessity of seeing him go, and that will become the practical measure of what's been accomplished.

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One of the most interesting conversations I heard was one man trying to explain on the phone to someone the profoundly democratic thrust of the protests.

He said to the person he was talking to that people see demonstrators chanting "Allah Akbar," and they conclude these protests must be organized by the Muslim Brotherhood. Then they see many famous actors and musicians showing up to Tahrir Square today, and they think it's just a middle-class protest of the intelligentsia.

But it's not the Muslim Brotherhood behind all this. It's not the middle class. It's not, as this man went on to say, only socialists and Marxists talking about workers' rights, and it's not people talking about just women's rights. This is really a protest of all Egypt united in a profound movement for democracy.

I think that's the first thing that has to be grasped about the uprising—that this is a movement that seeks fundamental democratic rights. As a friend of mine put it a few days ago, it's the 1789 of Egypt—similar to the opening of the French Revolution in that way.

I think the second aspect that became certain today is that this is no longer the Egypt that existed prior to January 25—and there's no turning back, however much violence the regime tries to organize. A tipping point has been reached in terms of the willingness of masses of people to put themselves on the line and defy the existing order, and that's a genie that will be very difficult to put back in the bottle.

The third aspect apparent today was, as I described earlier, the enormous self-organization of the movement in the face of horrendous violence and repression—most especially, the attacks that took place over the past few days.

The fourth point is broader—about what happens next. You now have a movement that has emerged in a most explosive fashion and is present in every Egyptian town and city, which is the product of many, many years of injustice, including around economic questions of unemployment and dispossession. But it's also an expression of the rise of a number of social struggles in Egypt, including the strikes of the last few years and the riots over rising food prices.

Right now, the movement is united around the political aim of getting rid of Hosni Mubarak. But hopefully, once Mubarak is unseated, the political questions will then mesh with social questions that still remain unresolved.

If that happens, there will be a really explosive mix of political and social issues that represents the possibility of political and social revolution.

I think that's the key to understanding why Mubarak hasn't left yet. It's not just a question of his own stubbornness, but how the regime can continue and the status quo can be maintained, not just for the Egyptian elite, but for Israel, the U.S., its European allies and so on.

Their interest is in preventing this process from triggering an even greater change. That's what these demonstrations are heralding, and we hope it's a process that will continue.

One last story from today: When Mubarak spoke on television on Tuesday night and said that he wouldn't run for re-election, he vowed that he was going to die on Egypt's soil. One *Socialist Worker* reporter quipped at the time, "We should tell him that the soil is ready for him." I translated that today at Tahrir Square, and I can report that it was greeted with wild applause and cheers—it's another part of the ongoing Egyptian revolution.

Socialist Voice #472, February 15, 2011

## **How the Egyptian People Toppled Mubarak**

*In an historic moment for the Middle East and the world, Egypt's military ruler, Hosni Mubarak, was forced from power on February 11 following 18 days of action by a splendid and relentless mass movement for democracy.*

*This article analyses the significance of the mass uprising in Egypt for the future of the Middle East and its peoples. Following it is a short report on a Toronto celebration of Mubarak's fall.*

*An important element of the uprising in Egypt has been the struggles of workers during recent years under exceptionally difficult conditions. The explosion of strikes by workers in the days preceding Mubarak's downfall sealed the fate of his rule. A very informative look at Egypt's trade union and working-class struggles was presented in the February 10, 2011 broadcast of Democracy Now. A lengthy interview with Stanford University Professor Joel Beinin begins at the 12-minute mark. He is the former director of Middle East Studies at the American University in Cairo. <http://www.democracynow.org/shows/2011/2/10>.*

*Dr. Beinin was the principal author of a 136-page study on the Egyptian labour movement that was published in February 2010 by the Solidarity Center (AFL-CIO).*

*Egypt's military have now announced plans to ban strikes.*

*A perceptive article, "Islamists and the Egyptian Revolution," has been published on the English-language web publication, Al Masry Al Youm: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/opinion/islamists-and-egyptian-revolution>.*

## **HUGE PROTESTS AND STRIKE WAVE TOPPLE MUBARAK**

**By Tim Dobson**

*(Green Left Weekly, February 13, 2011)* In a world-shaking event, after 18 days of constant street protests, the Egyptian people's revolution won a huge victory when dictator Hosni Mubarak finally resigned on February 11.

On that day, designated the "Day of Departure" by protesters, an estimated 20 million people (out of a population of about 80 million) were reported to have taken to the streets.

They defied a regime that had tried to crush the movement in blood. More than 300 people have been killed by security forces or pro-regime thugs since the uprising broke out on January 25.

Earlier in the week, there were fears the revolution was stagnating or even declining in the face of Mubarak's refusal to go. But huge protests took place across Egypt on February 8 as the pro-democracy movement took the offensive once more.

The Sydney Morning Herald said on February 9: "AFP journalists ... confirmed it was the biggest gathering yet in a movement which began last month... Witnesses in Egypt's second city Alexandria said a march there also attracted record numbers."

*Al Masry Al Youm* said the protest in Tahrir (“Liberation”) Square in Cairo surpassed one million people.

The huge protests were a response to a speech by Egyptian vice president and long-time intelligence chief Omar Suleiman that made it clear the regime was not willing to accept the demands of the protesters.

“”The February 8 New York Times said Suleiman “does not think it is time to lift the 30-year-old emergency law that has been used to suppress and imprison opposition leaders. He does not think President Hosni Mubarak needs to resign before his term ends in September.

“And he does not think his country is yet ready for democracy.

“But, considering it lacks better options, the United States has strongly backed him to play the pivotal role in a still uncertain transition process in Egypt.”

The effect of the February 8 protests was almost immediate. Protesters marched on Parliament house and tried to storm the building. When repelled, they settled for blockading and setting up camp outside the entrance.

ABC Online said on February 10: “An army general who ordered the protesters outside parliament to disperse and go back to Tahrir Square was met by chants of ‘we are not leaving, he is leaving’.

In a significant development, a strike wave swept Egypt the next day. Three independent trade unions began an indefinite strike combined with economic and political demands on the regime.

The strikes involved factory and textile workers, steel and iron workers, teachers, workers in the health ministry, workers in the military factories and even journalists working for state-run media.

The New York Times said on February 9: “In the most potentially significant action, about 6,000 workers at five service companies owned by the Suez Canal Authority — a major component of the Egyptian economy — began a sit-in on Tuesday night.”

Striking iron and steel workers demanded: the end of the regime; the dismantling of the union federation controlled by the ruling party; the “confiscation of public sector companies that have been sold or closed down or privatised ... and formation of a new management by workers and technicians”; and the “formation of a workers’ monitoring committee in all work places monitoring production, prices, distribution and wages.”

The Associated Press said that day: “For the first time, protesters were forcefully urging labour strikes despite a warning by Vice-President Omar Suleiman that calls for civil disobedience are ‘very dangerous for society and we can’t put up with this at all.’”

Such calls have especially come from the April 6th Youth Movement, which was formed in 2008 in solidarity with striking labourers in Mahalla.

AP said many workers were “motivated to strike when they heard about how many billions the Mubarak family was worth.”

The British Guardian said on February 4: “President Hosni Mubarak’s family fortune could be as much as [US]\$70bn (£43.5bn) according to analysis by Middle East experts.”

The regime continued to try to hold out. At least five people were killed and 100 wounded on February 9 when police opened fire on protesters.

On February 10, however, the strike wave spread further. Public transport workers went on strike, and about 24,000 textile workers struck in Mahalla.

Lawyers, doctors, public transport workers and energy workers joined the strike.

As protests and strikes built throughout the day, Egypt’s Supreme Military Council met to discuss “necessary measures and preparations to protect the nation.” It released “Communique No. 1,” which said the military would “support the legitimate demands of the people”.

Many took this as a sign that, under pressure from the army, Mubarak would step down. Speculation reached fever pitch when Egyptian state television announced Mubarak was to address to the nation.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Tahrir Square went silent as they waited for Mubarak’s expected resignation.

Silence turned to rage when it became clear Mubarak was refusing to go. When Mubarak spoke about all that he had done for the country, thousands held shoes in the air in a sign of disapproval.

Mubarak’s speech, described by the Angry Arab News Service (AANS) as the “dumbest speech ever delivered by a dictator,” appeased no one.

The next day, Tahrir square quickly filled to capacity after afternoon prayers. With no room in the square, some protesters marched on the state television office and the presidential palace to join protests that began the previous night.

Huge protests occurred in every big city in Egypt. There was a heavy military presence in the streets, as the Supreme Military Council met again.

Protesters waited to see if the military would live up to its words that it was “with the people.” The mood was again expectant, with one protestor writing on Twitter: “This is the third Friday of our revolution. The first was bloody, second was festive and third should be decisive.”

Signs emerged that Mubarak’s reign was truly on the brink.

Al Jazeera reported during the day: “An army officer joined protests in Cairo’s Tahrir Square say[ing] 15 other middle-ranking officers have also gone over to the demonstrators.”

At the state television office, activist Alaa Abdel Fatah told Al Jazeera: “The army have now given up and are letting the protesters control the flow of people around the state television building.”

The newly appointed general secretary of Mubarak’s National Democratic Party also resigned.

At 6pm Egyptian time, Suleiman addressed the nation with the words everyone was waiting for: Mubarak would step down. The president's powers would be transferred to the military command to oversee a transition.

Jubilation broke out throughout Egypt, reporters on television couldn't be heard due to the sheer noise. People power had beaten a dictator backed by the most powerful nation on Earth and who had ruled over them for three decades.

The army is widely respected in Egypt, but there is mistrust of many of the generals who were close to the Mubarak regime. The widespread feeling in among Egyptians is it was they who forced Mubarak out and it was their revolution.

Whatever comes next, Mubarak's resignation is a big step forward — as is the apparent sidelining of Suleiman, who is infamous for heading Egypt's torture program.

AANS said: "The biggest victory is that ... Suleiman is out of the picture now. Israel/US/Saudi Arabia were hoping that he would be the extension of Mubarak until some other clone of Mubarak is found."

The impact of Mubarak's fall on the already explosive Arab world remains to be seen. The Egyptian revolution was inspired by the overthrow of a dictatorship in Tunisia. But Egypt is much more central to the Arab world — and therefore to the interests of the US and Israel.

Already, the Hamas-led government in Gaza has called for the Egyptian government to open its border with Gaza to ease Israel's crippling siege — a move that would be hugely popular among Egyptians.

But the most immediate impact is on the consciousness of Egyptians. A 35-year-old Egyptian teacher told the February 5 *Guardian*: "People have changed. They were scared. They are no longer scared.

"We are not afraid of his system any longer and when we stopped being afraid we knew we would win. We will not again allow ourselves to be scared of a government. We will not be afraid to say when we think the president is wrong or the government is bad.

"This is the revolution in our country, the revolution in our minds. Mubarak can stay for days or weeks but he cannot change that."

This attitude was reflected on the streets of Egypt after Mubarak's resignation. Amid the scenes of wild jubilation, many protesters said they would not leave until they got some guarantees from the new government. Near the top of the list is a guarantee Mubarak will face trial for his crimes. Egypt will never be the same again.

## **TORONTO'S EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY CELEBRATES VICTORY**

By John Riddell

*(Toronto, February 13, 2011)* In yesterday's *Toronto Star*, columnist Thomas Walkom bluntly termed Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's departure from office that day a "military coup," in which "one faction of the armed forces ousted another."

He continues: "Egypt's military and business establishment remains firmly in charge. Mubarak may have gone. So far, Mubarakism remains."

It is hard to quarrel with this as a bare statement of fact. Yet there was no hint of this concern in yesterday's rally celebrating Mubarak's ouster, attended by more than 500 people from Toronto's Egyptian community and many friends and supporters. This was the fourth such action in two weeks, following on one the previous evening.

It was a joyous occasion, reflecting the conviction that a decisive corner had been turned. Among the chants (mostly in Arabic): Egypt is free!; Egypt: congratulations!; Long live Egypt! Free at last!

The rally featured an open mike, and all participants were invited to speak. A great many did so – mostly quite young and apparently unaffiliated to any political current. Speakers alternated between Arabic and English. Many read poems composed for the occasion, honouring the sacrifice and courage of the Egyptian activists. Many played popular Egyptian patriotic music over the loudspeaker, and everyone sang along. The Egyptian national anthem was sung several times.

James Clark of the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War led what he called an Arabic lesson for the Canadian public. He spoke words in English ("dignity", "freedom," etc.) and the crowd roared back the Arabic equivalents.

A Ugandan activist said, "This is a great moment for all Africa."

Almost all the speakers were young, and – despite their eloquence – seemed new to politics. The few speeches by veterans of solidarity politics were brief and to the point.

Mohammed Shokr of the Egyptian National Assembly for Change, who spoke so searchingly last week about the many steps needed to achieve freedom, focused this time on the significance of the moment. "We gained this freedom by our own means and not through America," he said. "Arabs will never be taken for granted again."

Khaled Mouammar of the Canadian Arab Federation led a moment of silence in honour of the martyrs of the struggle. The millions who joined in this struggle, people of every viewpoint and persuasion, have inspired the whole world, he said. Noting the protestors' courage, eloquence, and adroitness in action, he said "all the world can learn from this."

Stephen Harper's comments on the overthrow of Mubarak expressed no respect for the Egyptian people, Khaled said. Instead, Harper praised the dictator, conceding only that "they're not going to put the toothpaste back in the tube."

Ali Mallah of the Canadian Arab Federation said, “Yesterday, Tunisia. Today, Egypt. Tomorrow, Palestine.” He called this “a new day of history – out with all the dictators. Solidarity with all Arab people: We will rise again.”

Did the Toronto demonstrators miss the essence of post-Mubarak Egypt, as expressed by Thomas Walkom – perhaps out of political inexperience? I think rather that they were grasping for a deeper truth about the victory in Egypt. A great historic victory has been won, which must be savoured and understood, to prepare us all for the new stage of struggles already unfolding in Egypt.

Socialist Voice #473, February 20, 2011

## **At Home and Abroad, Canada Is Imperialist**

Todd Gordon.

*Imperialist Canada.*

Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2010.

### **Reviewed by Bill Burgess**

Todd Gordon's new book provides a compelling case that Canada is an imperialist country in its own right. His factual presentation of the matter will reinforce what is already a growing perception among Canadians.

Gordon's book concludes with a statement of purpose: "I hope *Imperialist Canada* will encourage people to re-think the traditional Canadian view of Canada's role in the world, and serve as a resource for those who have already moved beyond (that) them."

The traditional view to which Gordon refers is expressed by the title of Linda McQuaig's 2007 book, *Holding the Bully's Coat*. This title reflects the widely held assumption that Canada serves U.S. interests rather than its own. An important correction was provided by Yves Engler's *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* (2009). However, Engler did not address the structural roots of Canadian policy.

*Imperialist Canada* explains that Canada's increasingly imperialist actions in national and international affairs flow from the inherent tendency of capitalism towards over-accumulation. Gordon also emphasizes that "primitive accumulation" (seizing common property to accelerate capitalist exploitation) continues to play an important role.

This is not the first book to describe Canada as imperialist. However, Gordon argues that Canadian imperialism directed against Indigenous people within Canada is ongoing and central to the nature of Canadian capitalism. The book is an important advance over previous explicit characterizations of Canada as an imperialist state that did not develop this side of the analysis.

Chapters on "Violence and Eco-Disaster: Canadian Corporations in the Third World" and "Coups, Invasions and Occupations" offer case studies of key actions by Canadian imperialism abroad. The economic, diplomatic and military policy supporting Canadian corporate interests are systematically addressed in "Creating a World After its Own Image" and "Making the World Safe for Capital." The attention given to the record of Canadian mining corporations at home and abroad is a particularly useful contribution.

Gordon underlines that this country is a larger direct investor in the Third World than several other G7 countries widely considered imperialist. A strikingly inconvenient fact for traditional left-nationalists is that by 2008, "Despite Canada's economy being less than a tenth the size of the United States', Canadian corporations invested \$17.1 billion more in the U.S. than American corporations invested in Canada."

*Imperialist Canada* raises several questions that need to be clarified and discussed by supporters of its basic analysis. The first that comes to mind is the book's near-equation of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples within Canada to its relationship with countries in the Third World. Are there important differences that also need to be explored? And what about the internal imperialism against Acadians and Quebec that is not discussed but is also surely central to any understanding of Canada?

A second point is the ambiguity about what is new about Canada's more obvious imperialist stance in recent decades. Does the dramatic rise of its foreign investment and its lust for resources and labour on Indigenous territories within Canada register qualitative change in Canada's imperialist status? Part of understanding Canadian imperialism is its coming into being – when and how did this occur? Gordon's focus on the recent decades of neo-liberalism and globalization suggests a more recent turning point than is assumed by other characterizations of Canada as imperialist.

Todd Gordon has accomplished the purpose he set out of “encouraging people to rethink Canada's role in the world.” It is hard to imagine that anyone who reads his account of Canadian mining companies will think of the big bad multinational corporation as (almost always) American. He has assembled the key facts and arguments to make the case that there is “nothing inherently progressive about Canada that is being warped by American influence.... Pretending that this is the case misdirects our energies and anger from where it should be focused – the capitalist system of imperialism and the ruling elite in Canada.”

Socialist Voice #474, February 27, 2011

## **Canada and the Failed Reconstruction of Haiti**

The fraudulent electoral exercise that took place in Haiti on November 28, 2010 will proceed to a second-round runoff on March 20. The two presidential candidates will be former Duvalier associate Michel Martelly, 50, and Mirlande Manigat, 70, a member of a traditional political family of Haiti's elite. Together, the two candidates received eleven percent of the presidential votes cast on November 28. Only 22 percent of Haitians voted on that date, reflecting the disdain of the majority of the population for an exercise that was entirely funded by the big powers in Haiti and that saw the formal exclusion of Fanmi Lavalas, the political party of the exiled, former president Jean Bertrand Aristide.

Michel Martelly was placed on the second-round ballot following an extraordinary intervention by the United States and the Organization of American States that saw candidate Jude Célestin removed from the ballot. According to Haiti's Provisional Electoral Commission, Célestin narrowly beat Martelly for second place. But his key backer, incumbent President René Prével, has lost favor in Washington, Ottawa and Paris, in part because his administration is deeply unpopular among the Haitian people for its failure to act decisively in post-earthquake relief and reconstruction.

The Center for Economic Policy Research in Washington DC has conducted extensive examination of the chaotic balloting on November 28. Its report concluded that no fair and accurate count is possible. Earlier, the organization condemned the political exclusion that characterized the vote as well as the inadequate voter registration and election-day balloting that effectively disenfranchised a large part of the Haitian electorate. It says the November 28 presidential election saw the lowest voter turnout of any country in the Western hemisphere since at least 1947.

The tyrant who formerly ruled Haiti, Jean-Claude Duvalier, made a surprise return to Haiti from France on January 16. Meanwhile, Jean-Bertrand Aristide remains in exile in South Africa. The Haitian government bowed to widespread pressure and recently issued a passport to Aristide. But it has not taken other necessary steps to facilitate his return to the country. The United States, Canada and the OAS have warned that they do not wish to see Aristide return before the conclusion of the March 20 election/selection process.

The following article was first published in the New York/Port au Prince weekly *Haiti Liberté* on February 15.

### **FAILED RECONSTRUCTION IN HAITI DEBATED IN CANADA**

*Sharp critique of relief effort voiced by Michaëlle Jean on earthquake anniversary*

**By Roger Annis**

The first anniversary of Haiti's devastating earthquake was marked in Canada by widespread media disclosures concerning the failure of the international relief effort. Reports showed that considerable barriers exist to delivering the aid and reconstruction so desperately needed one

year later.

Many Canadians continue to act in solidarity with the victims of the tragedy. But while the Canadian government promises much, it has delivered little. It staunchly defends an earthquake relief effort that many aid workers, human rights agencies and other observers consider to be deeply flawed. Meanwhile, Canada continues to intervene destructively in Haiti's internal political affairs.

### **More promises than aid**

Ottawa has spent only a fraction of the funds it claims to be spending in Haiti. It says it will have spent "one billion dollars" in Haiti from 2006 to 2012, a figure cited by the media as well. The true amounts are far less.[1]

- In the two months following the January 12 earthquake, Canada gave some \$150 million to UN agencies and NGOs for emergency relief.
- At the International Donors' Conference Towards a New Future for Haiti held in New York City on March 31, Canada pledged \$325 million to Haiti for 2010/11 and \$75 million for 2012 and beyond. \$113 million was promised for "recovery and development" for 2010, including \$34 million in debt relief. Debt relief was paid; less than half of the remaining amount was disbursed.
- In a July 12 press release, Minister of International Cooperation Beverley Oda cited only two projects that Canada had funded to that date—the pre-donor conference \$150 million humanitarian expenditure and the \$34 million debt relief.
- \$7 million was donated to international health agencies for cholera treatment following the outbreak of the epidemic in October.
- The two largest non-police spending items by Canada are \$19 million to the World Food Program and \$19 million to construct a hospital in Gonaives. The hospital has been promised for many years and still sits as an empty field outside of Gonaives, with a sign over it announcing a "future" hospital to be funded by Canada.

These spending promises overlap with Canada's pre-earthquake, \$555 million aid budget for the years 2006-2011. Much of them are simply the pre-existing budget dressed up in new clothes.

The government says its priority in Haiti is the funding of "security," meaning training and equipping police and building prisons. Since the earthquake, Canada has announced spending in this area of at least \$58 million. This includes the construction of a training academy and a new national headquarters for the Haitian National Police.

Leaving aside the dubious claim that backing a repressive and dysfunctional police and judicial system in Haiti constitutes "earthquake relief," even this priority spending has not been fulfilled. According to a January 20 report in the Montreal daily *La Presse*, three of the six "security" projects announced by the government in 2010 have now been cancelled or postponed.

On January 11, Minister Oda announced several new expenditures totaling \$93 million, including "a project to provide free, basic health services to three million people, the rebuilding

of Haiti's midwifery school, new maternity beds and a pediatric ward." Details of these projects are typically sparse. Only time and dogged research into inadequate information sources will tell which of them is realized.

### **Backing repression and electoral fraud**

By far the most significant response to the Haiti earthquake by the federal government was the rapid dispatch of 2,000 soldiers and sailors in the days following. They performed rudimentary assistance in the regions of Leogane and Jacmel and were withdrawn a scant six weeks later, their declared mission of assuring "security" in post-earthquake Haiti deemed to be accomplished.[2]

Providing "security" in Haiti is foreign power doublespeak for preventing a return to the policies of social justice that guided Haiti's last sovereign and freely elected government from 2000 to 2004. That government, headed by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown by a foreign military intervention in which Canada took part.

The fraudulent election of November 28, 2010 shows that the same interventionist policies behind the 2004 coup d'état are still very present in Haiti. The election, which U.S. attorney and Legal Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights Bill Quigley recently termed a "puppet show," was crafted for the express purpose of selecting a president and legislature beholden to U.S. and other international capitalist interests. Only 22 per cent of the Haitian people voted; the country's most popular political party, the Fanmi Lavalas of exiled president Aristide, was formally banned from participation.

The Organization of American States, backed by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, then ordered the Haitian government to proceed to a second round (now scheduled for March) in which the declared second place finisher in the presidential race would be replaced by the third place finisher. They made clear that Haiti would pay a steep price if it refused to comply with this dictat.

In an emergency debate on the election held in the Canadian Parliament on December 13, all parties expressed support for taking the fraudulent vote to a second-round runoff.

### **Canadian immigration rejects almost half of Haitian applicants**

Immediately after the earthquake, demands poured into the Canadian government from the Haitian community and other interested parties to fast-track permanent or temporary residency of victims of the earthquake with family members in Canada. A special immigration program was established for this purpose; it closed on August 31.

The *Ottawa Citizen* reported February 10 that 49 per cent of the 4,800 permanent residency applications have been rejected. In contrast, the overall rate of approval for permanent residency applications to Canada in 2009-10 was 81 per cent.

In another area of the special program—temporary visas—the number granted to Haitians actually declined following the earthquake—from 4,400 in 2009 to 3,100 in 2010.

Another reunification program fared much better. Operation Stork successfully speeded up the adoption of Haitian orphans by prospective parents in Canada. Most of those parents are not of Haitian origin.

Marjorie Villefranche of the Maison d'Haiti community center in Montreal told the Citizen that rejection rates for Haitians are high because federal officials make few concessions to the situation in Haiti.

“They have been acting as if there had been no earthquake at all. ... There has been a real lack of humanity” in the way the program has been administered, she charges.

*La Presse* reported November 4 that the government of Quebec had received 8,354 family reunification applications. Of those, 2,400 were accepted and passed on to Ottawa for final approval. Only 18 had been accepted by the time of publication.

### **Former governor general speaks out**

Among the sharpest critics of the international aid effort in Haiti has been Canada's Haitian-born former governor general, Michaëlle Jean. Last November, Jean was appointed Special Envoy to Haiti for UNESCO.

“As time passes, what began as a natural disaster is becoming a disgraceful reflection on the international community,” Jean wrote in an open letter dated January 11, co-authored with Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO.

“Official commitments have not been honored. Only a minuscule portion of what was promised has been paid out. The Haitian people feel abandoned and disheartened by the slowness in which the rebuilding is taking place.”

The letter was published in major newspapers, including Canada's *Globe and Mail* and *Le Monde* in France.

Jean traveled to Haiti on January 12 and called for an abrupt shift in policy. Her concerns were widely aired by television and news reports in Canada during her visit to Haiti. She told CTV's Tom Walters, “It's time that the money that was promised, all those means, they have to start to deliver, deliver changes, and make sure the population is included.”

Michaëlle Jean's critical views are echoed by many others in a position to know. Robert Fox, executive director of Oxfam Canada, says extensive rebuilding of Haiti should have started by now. He says government and international agencies are moving too slowly and getting bogged down in bureaucracy. Reconstruction, he wrote in the January 12 *Ottawa Citizen*, “has yet to begin.”

Fox's colleagues in Oxfam U.S. produced a highly critical report of earthquake relief on the one-year anniversary.[3]

The international response to the cholera outbreak in Haiti has also drawn much criticism. In late December Unni Karunakara, president of the International Council of Doctors Without Borders, said “The inadequate cholera response in Haiti ... makes for a damning indictment of an international aid system whose architecture has been carefully shaped over the past 15 years.”

**A better year ahead?**

Most United Nations officials and many corporate NGOs are offering quite a different view of their work. Nigel Fisher, the United Nations humanitarian spokesperson in Haiti, told CBC radio on January 12 that aid and reconstruction is going as well as can be expected. “I’ve been here for most of the year, now, and I have seen change—debris removed, children back in school. We had a goal of building 30,000 transitional shelters last year and we’ve exceeded that target.

“Much of the resources last year were focused on humanitarian relief. The development resources have come on tap slower...”

Asked for his expectations in 2011, Fisher said, “We need a better year.” Referring to the electoral crisis, he added, “We need political stability. What keeps us worried is how long this current crisis will go on.”

Fisher and his colleagues in the United Nations’ MINUSTAH military occupation regime in Haiti backed the fraudulent election staged November 28, ignoring widespread calls to cancel the vote and start anew at a later date.

A similarly positive spin was presented by the president and CEO of Save The Children Canada, David Morley. “I think the effort at relief worked well,” he told listeners to the CBC’s Cross Country Checkup January 16. He said the camps of internally displaced Haitians are “in good condition.”

“All of the camps I have visited...have health care, the beginning of school and there is water.”

This flies in the face of reports by journalists and other Haitian and foreign observers. They report harsh conditions in most camps. Sanitation, potable water, schools for children and job prospects are in short supply. Haitian and international police have proven unable or unwilling to protect women residents of the camps from sexual violence.

Notwithstanding its claim to be “non-political” in its work, the Canadian Red Cross is another of the agencies arguing that the world is doing the best it can in Haiti. It is the largest recipient of donations from individual Canadians as well as Canadian government “matching” funds, some \$200 million in total. Red Cross societies around the world have spent less than 25 per cent of the \$1.2 billion they received.[4]

Why this indifference to the urgency of the Haitian crisis? Without doubt it reflects a cynical view in Ottawa, Washington and allied capitals that the desires and interests of Haiti’s people can be safely ignored, such as the popular demand for the return from exile of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. But they are running the very gamble they just lost in Egypt, a country of great strategic importance to them—the misguided idea that a people driven to desperate conditions will not find a way to assert their rights and their dignity.

*Roger Annis is a coordinator of the Canada Haiti Action Network and an editor of its website, [www.canadahaitiaction.ca](http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca).*

**Notes:**

1. Figures on Canadian aid to Haiti are drawn from two sources: the UN Office of the Special Envoy on Haiti, and various announcements by the Canadian government and its Canadian International Development Agency.
2. See “Exaggerated Claims: Assessing the Canadian Military’s Haiti Earthquake Response,” by Roger Annis.
3. <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/publications/haiti-progress-report-2010>
4. UN Office of the Special Envoy on Haiti, “Overall Financing: Key Facts,” December 2010.

Socialist Voice #475, February 28, 2011

## **How Can We Aid Libya's Freedom Movement?**

by **John Riddell**

The brutal massacres of civilians in Libya at the order of the country's dictator, Muammar Qaddafi, have shocked the world. His air force has carried out air strikes against unarmed civilians. On February 25, Qaddafi followers aimed murderous fire on anti-government protests in his last stronghold, Tripoli. The government declares its intention of reconquering the country in civil war.

What can we in Canada do to end the killings?

On February 26, the United Nations Security Council voted for sanctions against the Libyan regime, including an arms embargo and the freezing of assets of Qaddafi and his family. These measures are hardly more than cosmetic, serving to polish up great-power credentials.

Four days earlier, the New Democratic Party called for stronger action, advocating that Canada press the United Nations to "establish a no-fly zone in Libya's airspace." [1]

The "no-fly" proposal conjures up the vision of a protective hand stretched over Libya's troubled skies. But as Robert Dreyfuss commented in the *Nation* February 23, it is a dangerous idea.

"A no-fly zone is worthless unless the United States is prepared to back it up with overwhelming military force," Dreyfuss says. [2] In other words, U.S. fighters would invade Libyan airspace and shoot down any aircraft they find there. A no-fly zone is an act of war.

We know the logic of such actions from Iraq, where a U.S.-imposed no-fly zone was an initial step toward a murderous all-out assault.

Significantly, few calls for military intervention have been heard from Libya, a symptom of the imperialists' lack of influence in an insurgent movement that seems mindful of the need to protect national sovereignty.

### **Solidarity**

Nor were such calls made when Libyan-Canadians and their supporters rallied in Vancouver and Toronto February 26. Some of the signs carried by the 500 Toronto protesters read, "No Libyan blood for Libyan oil," "Freedom for the Arab world; kick out dictators." Actions took place in at least seven other cities.

A statement by the Toronto Arab Solidarity Committee, organizer of the action there, commented, "It is imperative that no military intervention is undertaken under the pretext of protecting the Libyan people... Decisions to support Libyans must be based on the demands of Libyans themselves and not on the agendas of international alliances." TASC consists of about a dozen Arab-Canadian organizations as well as Toronto Stop the War Coalition. [3]

Similar actions took place in seven other cities.

Derrick O’Keefe, an organizer of the Vancouver action and co-chair of the Canadian Peace Alliance, said the CPA “wanted to make clear that we would strongly warn against ... any kind of NATO military intervention.”[4] Sending in NATO “would be like calling the arsonist to put out the fire,” O’Keefe told this writer. He pointed to the example of Iraq, where “the oil fields were protected while hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed.”

Some writers have suggested that concern with intervention is misplaced. “We don’t believe, truly, that NATO is going to invade Libya,” write Santiago Alba Rico and Alma Allende in *Rebelión*. Raising this spectre “has the effect of entangling and blurring the anti-imperialist camp.”[5] The authors enumerate the Qaddafi regime’s many recent services to imperialism, including its active participation in George Bush’s “war on terror” and setting up “concentration camps where thousands of Africans headed for Europe are held.”

Alba Rico and Allende have their facts right but draw the wrong conclusion.

In an earlier period, the imperialist powers were at odds with the Qaddafi government, vilifying and harassing it. Indeed, in 1986 the British and U.S. governments carried out a brutal airstrike against the country, in which 60 Libyans were killed and 40 aircraft destroyed. But those days ended long ago. In recent years, the Qaddafi regime has been on the best of terms with the NATO powers.

### **Canadian complicity**

Canada has long been complicit in supporting the Qaddafi regime – in fact, Canadian engineering giant SNC-Lavalin has been building a \$275-million jail in Tripoli.

According to U.S. State Department cables revealed by Wikileaks, Petro-Canada paid Qaddafi and his cronies a \$1-billion “signing bonus” to obtain rights to extract Libyan oil for 30 years. These rights now belong to Suncor, one of Canada’s largest energy companies.[6]

It is not the Qaddafi regime that worries Stephen Harper and his allies, but a revolutionary people’s movement aiming to overthrow the dictatorship. To the NATO powers, that spells “instability” and an insecure oil supply. If they intervene, it will be in an attempt to quell the insurgent movement and reassert control in the guise of a new client regime. And Qaddafi’s murderous war against his people, if it continues, offers the NATO powers an opening for such an intervention.

As the British Stop the War Coalition notes, “Such interference over the last century is the root of the region’s troubles.... The future of Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen and all the other states facing popular uprisings must be determined by the people of these countries alone.”[7]

So far, the Libyan protesters have showed great courage and resourcefulness, winning control over a large part of the country.

The Libyan insurgents have not yet enjoyed the political freedom to chart a new course for their country. The immediate results of their struggle are unpredictable. But the broader significance

of their movement is already clear. It forms part of the great rising of Arab peoples, whose aims are democracy, human rights, popular sovereignty, and a chance to struggle for social justice.

Their victory in this difficult struggle would give a mighty impetus to the movements for liberation throughout the region.

The Arab revolution has already changed course of history. It is this great uprising, not the initiatives of Canadian and allied governments, that points toward a better future for the Arab peoples and the world. The Libyan and other Arab insurgents deserve our full support.

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## **Notes**

[1]. <http://www.ndp.ca/press/new-democrat-statement-on-ongoing-protests-in-libya-throughout-middle-east-north-africa>

[2]. <http://www.thenation.com/blog/158818/against-no-fly-zone-libya>

[3]. Contact the Toronto Arab Solidarity Committee at [arab.freedom2011 <AT> gmail.com](mailto:arab.freedom2011@gmail.com)

[4]. <http://www.straight.com/article-376924/vancouver/vancouver-demonstration-planned-saturday-support-libyan-people>

[5]. Translation from <http://machepera.wordpress.com/2011/02/26/from-latin-america-to-the-arab-world/>

[6]. <http://tgam.ca/BiZ3>

[7]. <http://stopwar.org.uk/content/view/2276/1/>