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## **Should Marxists Support Venezuela's New Socialist Party?**

*IST Debate Raises Vital Questions for the International Left*

**By Ian Angus**

President Hugo Chávez's call for a new socialist party in Venezuela has provoked widespread discussion and debate among socialists in Venezuela, across Latin America, and around the world.

The liveliest discussion in the English-speaking left has been a public debate among supporters of the International Socialist Tendency (IST), a loose affiliation of groups in about 25 countries. Identified historically with the view that the post-1928 Soviet Union was a state-capitalist society, this current has recently been among the most consistent and effective builders of the international movement against the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

The IST discussion deserves careful attention from partisans of socialism around the world, because it focuses on fundamental issues about our attitude towards the new wave of struggles now being waged in Latin America.

The IST's affiliates have defended Venezuela and the Chávez government from imperialist attack and have helped to expose Washington's efforts to destabilize the Bolivarian government. But they are not unanimous on what policy socialists in Venezuela and internationally should adopt towards the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which is now being organized.

### **Venezuela's New Socialist Party**

Chávez called for a new mass party in December 2006, as a means of breaking through the bureaucracy, cronyism and corruption that have long characterized Venezuelan politics. He described it as "a political instrument at the service not of blocs or groupings but of the people and the Revolution, at the service of socialism."

*Socialist Voice* was enthusiastic about the proposal:

“If built as Chávez advocates, the new party could solve the central challenge facing the Bolivarian movement: that of linking the worker and farmer base together with their chosen leadership in a cohesive, democratic political movement.”

The British Socialist Workers Party, the most prominent organization in the International Socialist Tendency, had a different view. Writing in *Socialist Worker*, SWP leader Chris Harman said the Venezuelan workers need to fight for socialism, but “Chávez merely decreeing from above that all the political forces that have defended him should unite into a single party will not make this happen.”

In a subsequent article, Harman described the PSUV as Chávez’s “from above” attempt to overcome “the chaos” in Venezuela. The PSUV includes, he wrote, three political currents: those who want to stop any further social changes, those who want “a Cuban-style authoritarian regime,” and those who want “the destruction of capitalism and genuine revolutionary democracy.”

“A party, in the real meaning of the term, is an organized current of people committed to a single political orientation. ... The attempt to combine in a single organization what are effectively three different parties cannot overcome the chaos.”

Harman was particularly critical of the plan to base the new party on the thousands of communal councils that have been formed in neighbourhoods, towns and cities across Venezuela. Community-based structures, he wrote, are “open to manipulation from above.” Rather, Venezuela needs “class movements arising from the point of production ... a central focus based on those connected to the means of production” and “rank and file soldiers’ councils” in the military.

It was not clear whether Harman was arguing that socialists should call for workers’ and soldiers’ soviets in Venezuela now, or should simply criticize the PSUV for not being based on such organizations.

### **Another View**

On May Day, 2007, the New Zealand affiliate of the IST issued a statement that expressed a quite different view. Describing the Bolivarian revolution as “the most important leap forward for the workers’ cause since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution,” they urged “all revolutionaries inside Venezuela ... to join this mass socialist party” and called on “revolutionary groups in other countries ... to establish comradely relations with the PSUV.”

Their statement was unequivocal in its endorsement of the new party:

“Socialist Worker-New Zealand believes the PSUV is vital to educate, unite and organise the grassroots masses in Venezuela so they can push forward the socialist revolution.”

The statement rejected the idea that the presence of multiple political viewpoints is a barrier to building the PSUV:

“It would be utopian to think that the PSUV could be an instantly homogenous party of revolutionaries. It will, however, be a mass socialist party with organic connections to

grassroots people who support the unfolding revolution. The process of building the PSUV will challenge the reformist wing of the Bolivarian movement and precipitate a 'battle of ideas' in which the masses will participate."

The New Zealand statement called on the IST to begin "facilitating this global debate among all Marxist groups."

"The forward movement of the Venezuelan revolution and the wider Latin American uprisings look likely to provide the essential material foundations for a positive regroupment of the socialist and radical left on every continent, and the parallel emergence of a mass socialist international."

### **The SWP Replies**

UK SWP leader Alex Callinicos responded to the New Zealand statement on May 24. He repeated the SWP's commitment to "defending Chávez and giving solidarity to the movement in Venezuela," but added a qualification: "the most important single internationalist task of revolutionaries today is to build the international movement against the 'war on terrorism.'"

As for Chávez:

"He presides over a bureaucratic state machine that continues to sustain capitalist social relations against the mass movements on which any real revolutionary breakthrough depends."

Chávez, in Callinicos's view, is engaged in a "constant balancing act between the state and the mass movements that he is constantly forced into." The PSUV is a "forced merger" that is in danger of becoming "a bureaucratic transmission belt for the government."

Callinicos approvingly referred to Chris Harman's assertion that the PSUV "cannot provide an answer ... cannot overcome the chaos."

Similarly, the International Socialist Organization, Australian affiliate of the IST, wrote that "the PSUV cannot in any sense be conceived as a revolutionary party," and that "It is a mistake to uncritically support Chávez's confused and eclectic strategy."

### **Proceed from Reality**

Socialist Worker-New Zealand had called for a global debate that extended beyond the ranks of the IST, offering to publish contributions on their website, UNITYblog. About a dozen groups and individuals from various countries have responded to date.

One insightful contributor is Stuart Munckton, a member of the Australia-based Democratic Socialist Perspective, and a frequent writer for Green Left Weekly. He wrote:

"The Callinicos/ISO position says, we support the gains and the advances, BUT the most important thing is all the problems and contradictions. The NZ comrades have turned this on its head and said, we recognise the limitations and contradictions BUT the most important thing is the advances for the class struggle, that we recognise, support and seek to relate to this. ...

“From what I can see, the NZ Socialist Worker has sought to proceed from the reality of the socialist revolution in Venezuela, not from an abstract measurement of a socialist revolution that demands any revolution has to score enough points on a scorecard to be recognised.”

### **Strengthen Anti-Imperialist Collaboration**

*Socialist Voice* editors Roger Annis and John Riddell contributed their views in an article that was also published in *Socialist Voice*.

Agreeing with Callinicos that “opposition to the war against Mideast peoples is the most urgent task of world solidarity,” they nevertheless insisted that the Venezuelan revolution is “creating an historic opportunity to strengthen international anti-imperialist collaboration and rebuild the revolutionary socialist movement worldwide.”

They warned against the temptation to “exaggerate the gains of the Venezuelan process or to project onto it our own hopes and goals.”

“The revolution is now unfolding within the framework of a struggle against imperialism and for national sovereignty and democratic rights. Capitalism still dominates the Venezuelan economy, shaping the daily existence of working people. Capitalism is now balanced against the growing power of working people, and this uneasy coexistence could continue for some time.”

“Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolution is still in its early stages. Yet as it moves forward, it will — like the Russian revolution of 1917 and other great revolutions of the 20th century — become a test for all tendencies in the workers movement, dividing those who identify with and defend real-world revolutions from those who remain in sectarian isolation....

“The founding of the new party offers revolutionary forces the possibility to unite against bureaucratic and patronage-ridden political machines and against left sectarianism. It is a creative process that deserves support.”

Annis and Riddell placed particular stress on the importance of Venezuela’s close relationship with Cuba. “These two peoples, acting in concert, are now the vanguard of a popular upsurge across much of Latin America and the Caribbean.”

### **Second Statement**

On July 7, Socialist Worker-New Zealand issued a Second Statement on the Venezuelan Revolution, which took up the relationship between leadership and mass movement in Venezuela.

“For some socialists, only the mass movement is propelling the revolution forward, while Chávez merely responds to pressures ‘from below.’ This analysis essentially characterises Chávez as someone unwillingly pushed along by the movement, whose main interest is trying to cling to power in the same way a reformist leadership might do.

“Socialist Worker-New Zealand rejects this view, which we see as one-dimensional and non-dialectical. We believe that Chávez, through what he says, and more importantly

through the chain reaction of events he is able to set in motion, is advancing the confidence, awareness and organisation of the masses. Rather than having to be pushed forward by the movement, Chávez has grown into a huge motivational and practical initiator of the socialist cause....

“A socialist leadership based on the masses and promoting their self-emancipation transcends the reformist dichotomy of ‘from above’ and ‘from below.’ “

They reiterated their view that “serious revolutionaries must be inside the PSUV, helping the party to integrate Marxist theory with the often unique practice of a real-life revolution.”

“Sadly, some ‘revolutionaries’ inside and outside Venezuela seem to believe an alternative ‘pole of attraction’ to the PSUV must be built. Yet standing outside the mass socialist party would be to invite sectarian isolation from the masses.”

They also rejected Callinicos’s argument that organizing against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is more important than supporting the Venezuelan struggle. Socialists must do both:

“Anti-war activism and Venezuelan solidarity are two sides of one coin. Each needs the other. That’s why Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution are an inspiration to freedom fighters across the Middle East. By refusing to prioritise one struggle over the other we don’t buy into imperialism’s bid to divide-and-rule the global grassroots.”

### **The Discussion Continues**

While this discussion was taking place, over five million Venezuelans formally declared their desire to join the PSUV. SWP leader Mike Gonzalez commented:

“The ‘socialist battalions’ of Venezuela’s new political party met last week in open assembly in various districts of the capital Caracas....

“There were debates throughout the movement as to whether to register. The problem was, and is, that none of the structures or aims of the PSUV have yet been defined....

“Chávez has announced that the PSUV will not be a Marxist party nor will it be based on class. The base units of the new organisation are to be geographical. This points to an electoral machine based on constituencies.”

In Gonzalez’s view, the mass movement must remain independent of the PSUV if it is the party of government.

“If, on the other hand, it becomes the political expression of that movement, challenging and questioning the government of Hugo Chávez, it will be a very different party from the one that is being built today.”

Daphne Lawless, a leader of Socialist Worker-New Zealand, responded that Gonzalez’s article was “one long missed opportunity.”

“His report seems to begin from a fixed idea — that a workers’ revolutionary movement can only grow in opposition to the government of Hugo Chávez. This is a regrettably

short-sighted attitude that neglects the mutually reinforcing dialectic between Chávez's government and the mass movement....

“The pessimistic scenarios envisioned in Mike's report can be prevented if Venezuelan revolutionaries join and help build the PSUV — and if those of us overseas seriously engage with it.”

**‘With the mass struggle against imperialism’**

The Canadian affiliate of the IST, the International Socialists, has not participated in the public debate, but one of its best-known leaders, Paul Kellogg, recently published his views on the PSUV, describing it as “an enormous step forward in the advancement of the Bolivarian process in Venezuela.”

“The first job of socialists in an oppressed country is to be with the mass struggle against imperialism and for sovereignty. Clearly the new vehicle which will express this struggle will be the PSUV.

“In fact, the stronger the left wing is inside the PSUV, the more the movement will be well placed to deal with the inevitable careerism and opportunism that will accompany an initiative on this scale.

“The second — and equally difficult job — is to make the links, in theory and in practice, between the fight against imperialism and for sovereignty with the need for a complete break from capitalism, and a new state of democratic socialism.

“A left current with that perspective that enthusiastically joins the PSUV will be able to begin that work.

“The job of the left in Canada and the Global North is to publicize this process Inside our social movements, and to be prepared to move quickly to oppose any attempt by imperialist governments to intervene and crush the mass movement in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America.”

**Participants and Partisans**

One of the most important lessons of the revolutionary struggles of the past century is that every mass social upheaval has new and unexpected characteristics. Revolutions are complex events that evolve in unpredictable ways, making use of the human and social raw material that is at hand when the struggle breaks out.

That lesson is being taught again today by the social upheavals in Latin America and the Middle East. The challenge before Marxists is to understand and relate to new forms of struggle, new issues, and new leaderships. The lessons of these events cannot be learned from the sidelines: to understand them, we must be participants and partisans, actively engaged in the struggle.

The IST's discussion of Venezuela is a concrete example of how a real revolution promotes engagement, rethinking, and debate among socialist and anti-imperialist forces internationally. It's a vitally important process, one that all Marxists are challenged to join.

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## **Nicaragua Today, Part One: Nicaragua's Sandinista Government Allies with Anti-Imperialist Forces**

**By Phil Stuart Cournoyer**

*Phil Stuart Cournoyer is a Nicaraguan citizen and longtime member of the FSLN [Sandinista National Liberation Front (Sandinistas)]. He has been an active socialist in Canada and Nicaragua for almost 50 years.*

*This is the first of two parts.*

More than six months have passed since the inauguration of the new “21st Century Sandinista” government of Nicaragua last January. Jubilant celebrations of that event expressed the excitement of hundreds of thousands of Sandinista supporters. New hopes for an escape from the hell of neoliberal catastrophes breezed across our country's mountains, volcanoes, valleys, and lakes, from the large cities to the remote hinterlands and coasts.

The FSLN leadership had used the election campaign to assure the country (and Washington) that no second edition of the 1979 revolution would take place. Even so, many wanted to believe that the new government would signal a return to the inspiring days and social advances of the revolution

What does the first six-month performance of the new government tell us about the relationship between reality and such hopes?

The Ortega government inherited a nearly “Africanized” country. Nicaragua is second only to Haiti as the poorest country in the hemisphere. Almost 80% percent of the population lives on less than US\$2 a day, and over half of them on less than US\$1 a day. The health and educational systems have been hollowed out. Over the previous 17 years a million or more Nicaraguans have gone into economic exile (mostly to Costa Rica, El Salvador, and the United States). The country now depends on family remittances and foreign aid to stay afloat.

### **Lights out**

The privatized national electrical system has been bled dry and brought to near collapse — especially its generating capacity. In 2006 severe power cuts were imposed across the country. The new government alleviated the problem for a time, relying on donated generator plants from Cuba and Venezuela. But more breakdowns in the system soon forced a return to long power cuts, from five to 10 hours daily in both rural and urban areas. This has created havoc in the economy, especially the retail sector, the health system, and people's daily lives.

The collapsed electrical system can be taken as a metaphor for the condition of the republic on the eve of the elections. The Sandinistas won the presidency largely because the traditional right-wing forces assembled in the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) had split down the middle. The Catholic Church was also divided, with now retired Cardinal Obando y Bravo opting to back the

FSLN in return for its support to a government-initiated bill that illegalized therapeutic abortion. These divisions, splits, and confusion in traditional ruling class formations (the Church hierarchy included) stemmed from a mounting lack of confidence in their own ability to keep the ship afloat, or rather, to re-float the shipwreck and pilot it away from rocky shores.

The FSLN drove through the gap opened by the split in the oligarchic parties and won a minority government in the November 2006 election with just 38% of the national vote. What followed caught the country and most political analysts, including this writer, quite by surprise.

### **Inauguration day**

The course of Ortega's new government was foreshadowed by the events surrounding its inauguration on January 10.

Presidents and high-level delegations attended from most Latin American and Caribbean countries, including the presidents of Mexico and other Central American countries. Hugo Chávez attended from Venezuela, and Evo Morales from Bolivia. Cuban vice-president José Ramón Machado stood in for Fidel Castro. Taiwan sent its president Chen Shui-bian; Iran and Libya sent high-profile representatives. Spain sent its Crown Prince. Perhaps just to be different, Canada and the United States sent low-profile delegations whose presence was not even noted in the official welcoming.

It turned out that Chávez had to delay his arrival by over three hours. Ortega kept the assembled VIPs and the Crown Prince himself waiting throughout the hot afternoon until our Venezuelan guests appeared. The event, including the long wait, was televised live. Broadcasts on rightwing TV and radio were punctuated by howls of protest from commentators about the "national disgrace" entailed in making Spanish royalty and visiting presidents wait around (and around!) for Chávez.

That was just the thin end of the wedge. After a drastically abbreviated swearing-in ritual, Ortega cut short the ceremony to join, as he explained, tens of thousands of workers, farmers, and youth waiting at a nearby lakeside plaza. They too had been celebrating for many hours under the hot sun. Off he went, accompanied by the new cabinet and his closest allies among the presidential visitors.

In the plaza, Chávez, Morales, and Ortega addressed the tired, but tumultuous crowd with strong appeals for Latin American unity, anti-imperialist struggle, national liberation, and socialism. Ortega interrupted his own speech to invite Cuba's José Ramón Machado to take the mike. The crowds greeted the Cuban compañero with a thundering roar of enthusiasm. The Taiwanese president shared the platform but did not speak.

The mass inaugural celebration introduced a new theme song for the FSLN, one that has accompanied both FSLN rallies and official functions ever since — *la Internacional* with its opening appeal "*Arriba los pobres del mundo*" (arise ye poor of the world). Our president-elect proclaimed that the new government represented a continuation of the Sandinista revolution of

the eighties. He announced that his first acts as president would be to restore free education and health services, a social conquest of the revolution, reversed by the pro-U.S. government elected in 1990.

He also announced that Nicaragua would join the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (its Spanish acronym ALBA also means “dawn”) to become fourth member after Venezuela, Cuba, and Bolivia. ALBA’s mandate is to facilitate commerce and cooperation among its members based on principles of solidarity and economic harmony, in overt opposition to the exploitative relations maintained by the world capitalist and imperialist market.

The next day the four ALBA presidents convened a public session carried live on radio and TV, where they signed a packet of agreements projecting major trade and cooperation initiatives to help lift Nicaragua out of the abyss. Venezuela forgave Nicaragua its debt.

### **Nicaragua-Iran agreements**

On the Sunday following the inauguration Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad arrived in Managua on a state visit. The two presidents announced major trade agreements and ties based on cooperation and friendship. Daniel Ortega used the visit to denounce U.S. aggression against Iraq and threats against Iran — a theme he again stressed during his state visit to Iran in June.

Recent follow-up announcements include an agreement that Iran will build a US\$350 million ocean port on the south Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and a pledge of US\$120 million to help build a massive hydroelectric project that could go a long way to solving the country’s long-term electricity deficit. Iranian cooperation, reached in bilateral agreements, is coordinated through ALBA, because it often involves joint Venezuelan-Iranian initiatives such as a recently constructed tractor factory in Venezuela that is supplying Nicaraguan farmers with low-priced machines.

In March Hugo Chávez returned to Nicaragua. He went to the indigenous community of Sutiava (in León province) where he and Ortega announced that Venezuela would build a US\$3.5 billion oil refinery on the Pacific Coast near Nagarote. This refinery will process Venezuelan oil both for Nicaragua and for export to other Central American countries and to China. Chávez insists that it will be completed before Ortega’s six-year term is finished, even if work has to take place 24-7. An allied petrochemical complex will also be built near the refinery, promising thousands of long-term jobs to local workers. These projects, when completed, should generate annually hundreds of millions of dollars of revenue for the country.

Chávez used the occasion to talk about his vision of the way forward for Latin American nations.

“Every day I say even more vigorously that the only way out of poverty and backwardness is to take the road of socialism, a new socialism built by ourselves....

“I believe that Christ is the first great socialist of our era, because Christ advocated equality, love among us, and the only way that we can have equality in society is through socialism. Capitalism is the kingdom of exploitation, inequality, and hate, of ambition

and egoism. Socialism is the kingdom of love, fraternity, and equality. This was what Christ came to preach to the world. And so, even though some priests will get uptight, I will keep on saying, for me as the Christian that I am, my Lord is one of the greatest revolutionaries in history, one of the greatest socialist revolutionaries in history.”

### **Venezuelan aid**

Fast forward to July 19: Chávez and Morales returned to Managua to join the celebrations of the 28th anniversary of the 1979 insurrectionary defeat of the U.S.-backed Somoza dynasty. The three presidents again united their voices to stress the urgent need for Indo-Latin American unity and vigilant anti-imperialist struggle. Chávez, never shy, once more used his formidable oratorical skills to advocate a socialist, anti-capitalist course for our Patria Grande — our term for the vast Indo-Black-Latin American nation extending from the Rio Bravo on the U.S.-Mexican border to Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of the continent, taking in the Caribbean island countries.

Venezuelan aid and trade agreements now amount to over US\$5 billion dollars. Much of this aid will be executed over a period of several years, and the overall amount will no doubt increase significantly over that time. Projects, in addition to the refinery, include an all-season highway from Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas) on the north Caribbean coast, southwest to Rio Blanco. The highway project will require the rebuilding of the Puerto Cabezas docks and a modern hospital for road construction workers that will also serve regional communities. Other programs include agricultural inputs such as farm credits, fertilizers, and related technologies, and also educational and health projects. Venezuela has guaranteed the country’s petroleum needs at fair prices, in the ALBA spirit. This involves long-term, low-interest payment agreements, including the option to pay in kind with agricultural, maritime, and mineral products — hence opening the possibility of expelling the dollar from commerce between the two Caribbean countries. All oil collaboration between the two countries is being channeled through an autonomous company — ALBANISA — responsible to the Venezuelan and Nicaraguan state oil companies.

Cuban aid mainly targets the health and educational sectors and is also channeled through ALBA. Cuban doctors and medical specialists are working mainly in the Caribbean coast autonomous regions, and in a newly opened eye clinic in Ciudad Sandino near Managua, part of ALBA’s Operation Miracle (OM). To date more than 12,000 Nicaraguans have attained improved or restored vision through the OM program. Many received their operations either in Havana or Caracas, but soon it will be unnecessary for Nicaraguans to leave our country to get treatment. Two more clinics will be opened in each of the two coastal regional capitals.

Nicaragua is to become a regional center for the program, enabling people from Mexico and Central America to get attention here. Cuban specialists are training Nicaraguan doctors who will later take full responsibility for the Nicaraguan component of OM. As well, about 80 just-graduated Nicaraguan general practitioners have recently returned from medical school in Cuba and are doing their internships with Cuban doctors in remote areas of the autonomous regions.

Cuban educators play a key role in the national literacy program, set in motion by an FSLN-inspired NGO two years ago. The new Ministry of Education adopted the program, creating the National Literacy Council to press the attack on a 34% illiteracy rate. Using the Cuban *Yo sí puedo* technique and tens of thousands of TV monitors donated by that country, the program has now conquered illiteracy in Managua. Soon UNESCO will declare Managua the first Central American capital to free itself from illiteracy. The Literacy Council's two-year target is to help 800,000 more Nicaraguans to read and write.

### **Brazil's Lula**

Other countries beyond the ALBA alliance and Iran are also stepping up aid to Nicaragua, most importantly Brazil. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (most often known as Lula) visited Nicaragua in July and signed a series of agreements in various areas including tourism, education, energy, forestry, industry, commerce, generic medicines, and agriculture. He and Ortega concurred that ethanol should not be produced from corn or other food products except sugar cane or palm oil, a compromise position that was subsequently endorsed by Venezuela.

In August Taiwan's president again visited Nicaragua, promising to increase his government's aid. Taiwanese capital employs over 30,000 Nicaraguan workers, mostly in the *maquila* sector. Chen Shui-bian promised that Taiwan would buy Nicaragua's entire coffee crop, hoping that this and other aid will entice Nicaragua not to follow Costa Rica's lead and break relations with Taipei in order to re-establish relations with China. In his parting words as he left for home, Chen Shui-bian suggested that Daniel Ortega would merit a Nobel Prize if he succeeds in convincing Beijing to accept Nicaraguan recognition without compelling a break with Taipei!

Days after the inauguration Ortega scuttled the former government's plan to privatize water. He appointed Ruth Herrera (longtime Sandinista and leader of the consumer protest against water privatization) to take charge of the national water utility. She immediately decreed that the wealth-burdened elite — including their plantations, breweries and bottling plants, industries, and hotels — would have to pay their water bills. They shed this obligation once their cronies took power in 1990.

The most important economic initiative of the government in the countryside is the Zero Hunger Campaign aimed at the poorest sectors of the population, especially women farm-owners. This US\$150 million project is expected to benefit 75,000 families during the next five years through programs to revive and support small-scale family farming.

Nearly two-decades of neoliberal "adjustment" devastated small farmers and traditional crops that could not compete with highly subsidized U.S. agricultural exports. During that time most of the gains of the agrarian reform of the eighties were reversed as old and new capital bought out farmers bankrupted by lack of access to affordable credit. The new program provides farmers with impregnated cows and sows, chickens, seeds, and free agronomy services. In tandem with the Zero Hunger effort, ALBA launched a low interest farm-credit program, largely financed by

Venezuela's National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES) through its new Managua branch office.

When Hurricane Felix devastated Nicaragua's Atlantic coast in early September, the central government responded energetically and in concert with authorities of the regional autonomous government — largely an indigenous administration. Longtime Miskitu leader Brooklyn Rivera, who in the eighties led a wing of the indigenous armed struggle against the Sandinistas, lauded the government not only for its humanitarian aid but for having “reacted with sensitivity, taking into account conditions in the indigenous communities, their way of life, their organization, and their world view.” (For information on reconstruction aid, see end of article.)

### **Economic policy**

The most puzzling feature of the first six months of the government has been the relative lack of discussion of basic economic policy, including a new agreement being negotiated with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Daniel Ortega's February budget was a remake of the previous government's numbers, with the exception of a significant increase of spending on education and health, and allocations to the new Zero Hunger program. A reprieve from some large foreign debts made this spending possible.

The budget failed to include more progressive taxation measures, despite widespread clamor that the rich — especially bankers and financial sharks — should begin to pay taxes. The budget included commitments to continue to pay off the internal debt, a large part of which is owed to speculators who snapped up a government bond issue used to rescue deposits holders following major bank collapses in 2000-2001. Later, official entities such as the Auditor General and the State Prosecutor declared that this “debt” is illegal.

Nevertheless, the previous and current governments and the National Assembly have argued alike that failure to honor this “debt” would unleash “panic in financial markets” and “ruin Nicaragua's international credit status.” The debt payments are crushing, and dwarf the entire fund being devoted to the campaign against hunger. This provokes deep resentment among poor and middle-class sectors who question why their taxes, and foreign aid, should be converted into handouts to parasites — the bankers, finance companies, and coupon clippers.

The FSLN leadership's economic strategy is to lift the country out of the pit of neoliberal devastation through market-oriented, capitalist measures coupled with social and budgetary policies to cushion the poorest and most vulnerable sectors from the worst impacts of free trade and capital accumulation. They believe this will only succeed if more foreign investment comes in, and if a “good investor climate” is assured. Hence, the reluctance to repudiate what is clearly an illegal internal debt.

### **Secret talks**

The negotiations with the IMF have largely been held in private. To date not much is known about them, except that macroeconomic policy will remain largely unaltered. Both right- and

left-wing critics of the government have complained about the secret nature of these talks, although the previous three governments were never known for openness in their dealings with imperial masters. Details of the finalized IMF agreement should become clear with the discussion of the 2008 budget that will have to take into account the impact of last year's entry into a "free trade" agreement with the United States.

### **The U.S. cries foul**

The grand scheme is to cobble together a two-pronged economic course that relies both on U.S.-sponsored "free trade" and the ALBA alliance, in addition to trade and aid with Iran, Brazil, and Taiwan. But imperialism can hardly be expected to accept this combination without protest. The inherent conflict was laid bare by Nicaragua's recent (and still unresolved) conflict with Esso, the giant U.S.-based oil concern.

In mid-August Esso arrogantly refused to allow Petronic (Nicaragua's public petroleum corporation) to offload and store Venezuelan oil in its tanks at the port of Corinto on the north Pacific coast. The government responded by sending Esso a bill for millions of dollars in unpaid taxes and custom charges, and a Corinto judge impounded the oil storage tanks pending resolution of the dispute. The Esso tanks were filled with Venezuelan crude.

Esso and the U.S. ambassador Trivelli cried foul, denouncing the alleged violation of property rights. The big-business association COSEP parroted this line, as did ALN head and banker Eduardo Montealegre, and other right-wing politicians. Vice-president Jaime Morales shot them down. "No private interests," he insisted, "can be allowed to trump national interests." He stressed that the oil was desperately needed to cope with constant electricity cuts.

Esso is refusing to negotiate unless and until the court restores full and uncontested control of the tanks to their foreign owners. Morales warned Esso that it was making a grave error, resorting to a popular expression: "*No sólo se le fue la mano sino también los pies.*" His image here is unmistakable — such errors can cost an arm and a leg! Strong words from our vice-president, a former Contra leader.

Meanwhile the city of Managua has also moved against Esso for unpaid local taxes, and the Ministry of the Environment has re-opened an investigation of a recent perilous oil spill just outside Managua. Esso says vandals caused the spill. As one skeptic put it, "Some spill! Some vandals!"

### **Contesting 'hegemonic values'**

Esso's provocation in Corinto this August recalls the initial skirmishes between Cuba and the U.S. government and oil monopolies in 1960 that sparked Cuba's showdown with imperialism. The Nicaraguan government's alignment with anti-imperialist forces and its initial, limited measures to alleviate popular suffering invite U.S. retaliation, combined with increasing class conflict and polarization.

Frente leaders are well aware of the dilemmas and risks involved in the Sandinistas' economic policy, but see no viable alternative. Sociologist Orlando Nuñez, perhaps the main theoretician and ideological defender of the FSLN government, and head of the Zero Hunger campaign, put it this way:

“For a party with a socialist mission like the Sandinista Front, our situation is very complex and contradictory. The party holds the presidency and has the most political sympathizers in Nicaragua. However, it is still a minority in other state powers, and faces an opposition that is trying to unite and jointly oppose it. This party, now in power, has to administer a country where capitalist economy dominates and must govern a society whose hegemonic values are liberal and neo-liberal. Its strategy implies defending revolutionary measures of the government and acting as a party opposed to the capitalist system now in force.”

But how can we Sandinistas contest capitalist “hegemonic values”? In Venezuela, repeated popular mobilizations turned back the right-wing assault. Can Nicaragua follow a similar path?

*Part two of this article will attempt to describe the responses of opposition parties and forces in Nicaragua to the FSLN's course, Washington's reaction, and how grassroots people and movements are reacting to new openings and challenges.*

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### **Hurricane reconstruction aid**

On September 4 hurricane Felix hit land at Sandy Bay, in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua (RAAN). The furious category-5 force devastated almost everything in its path. Eighty-percent of the social and economic structure of Bilwi, the regional port and capital, was destroyed. Regional, national, and international authorities all estimate that there are at least 100,000 victims. More than 130 were killed, and over 100 persons are missing. Most trees in the huge Bosawas Biosphere reserve, the largest in Central America, were toppled.

Solidarity forces in Canada have rallied to provide assistance to the rebuilding efforts. For information on how people in Canada can help, see the website of York University's Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean at [www.yorku.ca/erlac/index.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/erlac/index.htm).

Socialist Voice #205, September 24, 2007

## **Proposal to Fund Separate Faith-Based Schools Endangers Ontario Public Education**

by **Richard Fidler**

The issue of government support for faith-based schools, a perennial question in Canada's most populous province, Ontario, is once again a topic of public debate. With a general election scheduled for October 10, the opposition Progressive Conservative (PC, or Tory) party is calling for direct government funding of non-Catholic, faith-based schools "in the same way" as Ontario already funds a separate Roman Catholic public schools system.

The Tory proposal has been characterized by the big business media as the "defining issue" in the election. It has elicited fierce polemics on call-in shows and in letters-to-the-editor. Newspaper columnists and editorials debate the pros and cons. Where do the interests of working people lie in this debate?

The Conservatives, of course, are clearly plumping for votes among ethnic and religious minorities. But the Tory proposal, while limited to faith-based schools, is widely and correctly perceived as a further step toward weakening the public school system and lowering the quality of education available to Ontario citizens. It would open the door to further extension of private educational institutions at all levels and result in increased segregation of students and inequality of standards and facilities. And there are wider implications as well.

### **What about the Catholic "public" schools?**

Just over 50,000 students in Ontario attend private faith-based schools. About half of them are in fundamentalist Christian schools. Another 20% are in Jewish parochial schools, and fewer than 10% in Islamic schools.

However, a whopping 600,000 students — about 30% of all Ontario elementary and secondary students — attend government-funded separate Catholic schools. What this means is that about 93% of all faith-based schools in Ontario are already fully funded by the province!

But among the major parties only the Greens call for an end to the separate Catholic schools and for one publicly funded universal public school system open to all.

(The public system would maintain the present French-language schools — currently divided between public non-denominational and Catholic boards. Ontario's Francophone population is a national, not ethnic minority that historically waged a hard-fought struggle to overcome a ban on French schools. Of Ontario's 72 school boards, 12 are French-language (8 Catholic and 4 public), with a growing proportion of enrolment in the public schools.)

The governing Liberals and the third-largest party, the social-democratic NDP, oppose the PC proposal but find it embarrassing. Their support of continued public funding of separate Roman Catholic schools, while opposing similar funding for other faith-based schools, clearly favours

one religion over others. In 1984, both parties supported the then PC government when it extended the Catholic system to include all high school years.

On two recent occasions (1999 and 2005), Ontario's discriminatory funding formula has been denounced by the United Nations Human Rights Committee. As the UN committee states, "... if a State party [Canada] chooses to provide public funding to religious schools, it should make this funding available without discrimination." That is, either provide equal public funds for all religions or no public funds for any.

The Tory response is to create more government-funded separate school systems. The Tories make the preposterous claim that their proposal is "inclusive" — and neither the Liberals nor the NDP have challenged that claim. In fact, it is the opposite, dividing students from each other according to their parents' religious beliefs (and, for many, according to ethnic origin).

Working people, in contrast, have every reason to promote the integration of students in one publicly funded school system and the elimination of all government funding for separate and private schools, whether faith-based or not.

### **What kind of 'public' education do we want?**

To be credible, however, a defence of public schools must also address the sorry state of today's schools and, more generally, of public education under late capitalism.

The educational system as a whole is a microcosm of class society, with all its divisions and inequality, and the education of children is an important terrain of class struggle. The capitalist rulers have always had their own exclusive schools for the education of their children, their legatees. The public schools, for the rest of us, are institutions for instilling the capitalist conception of society and creating a compliant labour force for the employers. This class bias is reflected in every aspect of the public system, from the streaming of students between trades and professional orientations to the content of core curriculum, particularly social studies.

Of course, no great importance is accorded to the quality of physical infrastructure, cultural and sports activities, or to staff relations within the public system. Under the neoliberal capitalist offensive, the public schools are increasingly underfunded, "extra-curricular" and special education programs are eliminated, and teacher unions are under constant attack.

Working people benefit from an educational system that furthers their unity, not their division. They need education that builds the knowledge, consciousness and confidence of the toiling classes in their collective capacity to manage the affairs of society. Teachers should be encouraged to use their professional skills to help broaden the cultural and scientific horizons of their students.

The issue of religion in the schools must be approached on the basis of a critique of capitalist education and an alternative conception of universal public education.

For a variety of reasons, faith-based schools — Catholic or non-Catholic — are popular in Ontario. For example, some ethnic and religious minorities, not least among the rapidly growing

immigrant population, feel alienated from a “secular” public school system that makes no attempt to acknowledge their religious beliefs or accommodate their religious practices.

Many parents turn to personal and sectarian solutions, and the capitalist education system is only too willing to accommodate them in that regard through provisions for charter schools, vouchers, tax credits, etc. Such practices are widespread in the USA and, increasingly, in some of the more conservative provinces of Canada such as Alberta. In Ontario, the previous Conservative government voted a tax credit for parents who send their children to private schools. While the tax credit was overturned in 2003 by the newly elected Liberals, there are prominent members in both of these traditional capitalist parties who favour some form or other of government funding for private schools.

Some, like Tory leader John Tory (yes, that’s his name!) are even prepared to allow public funding of schools preaching “creationism” in opposition to the science of evolution — a clear sop to a particular layer of right-wing Christians who play an increasingly important role in government circles in both the USA and Canada. (The current federal minister in charge of police and prisons, Stockwell Day, for example, is on record as believing that dinosaurs coexisted with humans.) No such indulgence has been displayed toward Islam, however.

### **Integration requires reasonable accommodation**

Educating children within a common social and institutional environment is probably the most important integrative device at the disposal of any society. As proof, we in Canada need only look to the powerful effect Quebec’s establishment of a single public and predominantly French-language school system has had in reinforcing the defining French character of that nation and integrating youth of non-Francophone and immigrant origin as fully functioning citizens of Quebec. (See sidebar at end of article.)

If minority religious communities are to be attracted to the public education system, however, that system must be receptive to their concerns. Where parents feel that religious beliefs and practices must be an integral part of the educational process, there is no a priori reason why some at least of those needs cannot be accommodated within a universal public system. This could involve such things as providing prayer rooms for practicing Muslims, providing non-pork diets in schools attended by Jews and Muslims, and so on. A court ruling that a child could wear the Sikh kirpan, a religious symbol, despite a school ban on this ceremonial dagger as a “weapon,” allowed Sikh children to be accommodated within the French-language public school system in Quebec.)

Some instruction in particular religions might even be made available to children whose parents so request — especially parents in immigrant communities often suffering discrimination and oppression on the basis of their religious identity.

The overriding consideration should be the need to encourage all parents to have their children educated within the common school system where they can be exposed to a diversity of ethnicities and religions and introduced to the widest range of beliefs and values, and receive

generic education about world religions as a component of courses in world cultures and civilizations.

Such accommodation must be reasonable, of course. John Tory's willingness to fund schools preaching "creationism" is unreasonable. Religious instruction should not trump science.

### **Widen the public debate**

Issues such as these, however, illustrate the need to open up a wide-ranging public debate over the role and scope of public education, including what if any accommodation should be available for religious belief and practices within the public schools. In particular, we need critical input from progressive parents and educators, teachers, and their unions — all of whom have many proposals to advance on how to rescue public education from its current disrepute and disrepair.

Teachers, for example, have some important contributions to make in this regard.

In Quebec, the militant teachers union, the CEQ, published in the 1970s radical critiques of capitalist education, such as the pamphlets *L'école au service de la classe dominante* (1972) and *École et lutte de classes au Québec* (1974). In 1979 the CEQ implemented its alternative concept of progressive education through a major campaign in Quebec schools to raise funds and provide material aid to the mass literacy campaign undertaken by the new Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

In Ontario, in the 1960s, radical teachers caucused within their unions and published a journal, *This Magazine is About Schools*, that offered a left critique of capitalist schooling. Today, the Canadian Centre on Policy Alternatives publishes a teacher-edited quarterly journal, *Our Schools / Our Selves*, that to some degree resembles the earlier publication..

Supporters of public education need to engage with these issues in the current public debate on separate schools, by discussing and developing an alternative conception of education that is focused on the interests of the child and the child's need for exposure to the vast diversity of people and ideas within our society.

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### **Sidebar**

#### **Quebec's Approach: a Secular, but Constitutionally Fragile, Public Education System**

Defenders of Ontario's discriminatory system invoke a "historic compromise" entrenched in the country's Constitution of 1867, which gave minority ("dissentient") Catholic schools in Ontario the same entitlement to public funding as minority Protestant schools in Quebec. However, this constitutional restriction can be removed by a simple amendment with the support of the Ontario legislature and the federal Parliament. In 1997 Quebec got a similar amendment by Parliament to remove the constitutional requirement for a separate Protestant public school system.

The Protestant school system in Quebec had functioned essentially as an English system that ghettoized Anglophone children and (because of its attraction to many immigrants) served in

practice to hinder the integration of new immigrants with the province's Francophone majority. As Quebec moved to affirm French as the sole and universal language of public communication and discourse, it was obliged to integrate the separate public school systems into one largely secular system that is overwhelmingly French (albeit with an English component for the children of parents previously educated in English in Canada who choose to have their children instructed in English).

Removing French-language public education from the grasp of the Catholic hierarchy facilitated the enrolment of non-Catholic youth — both immigrants and native born — in the Francophone system. It eased the acquisition of French language skills among non-Francophones, making them more comfortable within the majority French culture of Quebec.

Within this public system, Catholic and Protestant religious education was continued for a transitional period. However, beginning in September 2008, that curriculum will be replaced by a course in ethics and religious culture that will include studies of six world religions, among them Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and “the spiritualities of the Aboriginal peoples”.

The Quebec department of education states: “By bringing [children] together in the same classroom, instead of separating them according to their beliefs, and by promoting the development among them of attitudes of tolerance, respect and openness, we prepare them to live in a pluralist and democratic society.”

However, Quebec's reform is still incomplete and under constant attack. The Quebec government partially funds private schools, which account for almost 10 percent of total elementary and secondary enrolment, the highest proportion in Canada. These private schools, many of which are faith-based, are disproportionately English. Moreover, the province's Court of Appeal ruled in August that children who are otherwise ineligible for instruction in English may attend English public schools if their parents first send them to an unsubsidized English private school. The Court used the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to overturn a provision of Quebec's Charter of the French Language.

Socialist Voice #206, September 26, 2007

## **Bolivia and Cuba: Radical Action Needed Now to Stop Global Warming**

**Letter from Bolivian President Evo Morales  
to the members of the United Nations, September 24, 2007**

Sister and brother Presidents and Heads of States of the United Nations:

The world is suffering from a fever due to climate change, and the disease is the capitalist development model. Whilst over 10,000 years the variation in carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) levels on the planet was approximately 10%, during the last 200 years of industrial development, carbon emissions have increased by 30%. Since 1860, Europe and North America have contributed 70% of the emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>. 2005 was the hottest year in the last one thousand years on this planet.

Different investigations have demonstrated that out of the 40,170 living species that have been studied, 16,119 are in danger of extinction. One out of eight birds could disappear forever. One out of four mammals is under threat. One out of every three reptiles could cease to exist. Eight out of ten crustaceans and three out of four insects are at risk of extinction. We are living through the sixth crisis of the extinction of living species in the history of the planet and, on this occasion, the rate of extinction is 100 times more accelerated than in geological times.

Faced with this bleak future, transnational interests are proposing to continue as before, and paint the machine green, which is to say, continue with growth and irrational consumerism and inequality, generating more and more profits, without realising that we are currently consuming in one year what the planet produces in one year and three months. Faced with this reality, the solution can not be an environmental make over.

I read in the World Bank report that in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change we need to end subsidies on hydrocarbons, put a price on water and promote private investment in the clean energy sector. Once again they want to apply market recipes and privatisation in order to carry out business as usual, and with it, the same illnesses that these policies produce. The same occurs in the case of biofuels, given that to produce one litre of ethanol you require 12 litres of water. In the same way, to process one ton of agrifuels you need, on average, one hectare of land.

Faced with this situation, we – the indigenous peoples and humble and honest inhabitants of this planet – believe that the time has come to put a stop to this, in order to rediscover our roots, with respect for Mother Earth; with the Pachamama as we call it in the Andes. Today, the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the world have been called upon by history to convert ourselves into the vanguard of the struggle to defend nature and life.

I am convinced that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, recently approved after so many years of struggle, needs to pass from paper to reality so that our knowledge and our participation can help to construct a new future of hope for all. Who else but

the indigenous people, can point out the path for humanity in order to preserve nature, natural resources and the territories that we have inhabited from ancient times.

We need a profound change of direction, at the world wide level, so as to stop being the condemned of the earth. The countries of the north need to reduce their carbon emissions by between 60% and 80% if we want to avoid a temperature rise of more than 2° in what is left of this century, which would provoke global warming of catastrophic proportions for life and nature.

We need to create a World Environment Organisation which is binding, and which can discipline the World Trade Organisation, which is propelling us towards barbarism. We can no longer continue to talk of growth in Gross National Product without taking into consideration the destruction and wastage of natural resources. We need to adopt an indicator that allows us to consider, in a combined way, the Human Development Index and the Ecological Footprint in order to measure our environmental situation.

We need to apply harsh taxes on the super concentration of wealth, and adopt effective mechanisms for its equitable redistribution. It is not possible that three families can have an income superior to the combined GDP of the 48 poorest countries. We can not talk of equity and social justice whilst this situation continues.

The United States and Europe consume, on average, 8.4 times more than the world average. It is necessary for them to reduce their level of consumption and recognise that all of us are guests on this same land; of the same Pachamama.

I know that change is not easy when an extremely powerful sector has to renounce their extraordinary profits for the planet to survive. In my own country I suffer, with my head held high, this permanent sabotage because we are ending privileges so that everyone can “Live Well” and not better than our counterparts. I know that change in the world is much more difficult than in my country, but I have absolute confidence in human beings, in their capacity to reason, to learn from mistakes, to recuperate their roots, and to change in order to forge a just, diverse, inclusive, equilibrated world in harmony with nature.

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**Speech by Cuba’s Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque,  
to the UN high-level event on climate change in New York, September 24, 2007**

Mr. President:

We met, as we are doing now, fifteen years ago at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro. It was a historic moment. There, we took on the commitment later on contained in the Convention on Climate Change and, subsequently, in the Kyoto Protocol. Cuba was then the first country to take the environmental issue to a constitutional platform.

That day, President Fidel Castro delivered a brief and fundamental speech, which overwhelmed those present in the plenary of such conference. He told profound truths, breaking them down one by one from an unwavering ethical and humanistic position:

“An important biological species is at risk of disappearing due to the rapid and progressive elimination of its natural habitat: man.

“... consumer societies are fundamentally responsible for the atrocious destruction of the environment.

“The solution cannot be to hinder the development of the neediest.

“If we want to save humanity from that self-destruction, there must be a better distribution of the available wealth and technologies on the planet. There must be less luxury and less squandering in a few countries so that there will be less impoverishment and less famine in a large portion of the Earth.”

The truth is that almost nothing was done afterwards. The situation is now a lot more critical, the dangers are greater and we are running out of time.

The scientific evidence is clear. Practical observation is overwhelming. These could only be called into question by irresponsible people. The last ten years have been the warmest. There is a decrease in the thickness of arctic ice. Glaciers are receding. Sea level is on the rise. Also increasing is the frequency and intensity of hurricanes.

The future looks worse: some 30% of all species will disappear if global temperature increases by 1.5 to 2.5 degrees centigrade. Small island states are running the risk of disappearing under the waters.

In order to face the danger, we have agreed on two strategies. Mitigation, which is the reduction in and absorption of the emissions; and adaptation, referring to actions aimed at reducing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

However, it is increasingly clear that this dramatic situation will not be tackled unless there is a shift in the current unbridled production and consumption patterns, presented as the dream to achieve through an unscrupulous and ongoing worldwide advertising campaign on which a trillion dollars is invested every year.

We have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries, responsible for 76% of the emissions of greenhouse gases accumulated since 1850, have to bear the brunt of mitigation and must set the example. What is even worse is that their emissions increased by over 12% between 1990 and 2003, and those of the United States in particular grew by over 20%. Therefore, they must begin by honoring the ever-modest commitments contained in the Kyoto Protocol and by taking on new and ambitious goals to reduce emissions as of 2012.

The problem will not be resolved by purchasing the quota of the poor countries. That is a selfish and inefficient path. Nor will it be resolved by turning food into fuels as proposed by President

Bush. It is a sinister idea. Real reductions must be achieved in the emission sources. A real energy revolution must take place with a focus on saving and efficiency. A great deal of political will and courage is required to wage this battle. Cuba's modest experience, successful and encouraging despite the blockade and the aggressions that we suffer from, is proof that we can do it.

On the other hand, the fight against climate change cannot be an obstacle impeding the development of the over 100 countries that have yet to attain it and which, by the way, are not the historic culprits of what has happened; it has to be compatible with the sustainable development of our countries. We reject the pressures on the underdeveloped countries to enter into binding commitments to reduce emissions. What is more, the portion of global emissions pertaining to the underdeveloped countries must increase in order to meet the needs of their socio-economic development. The developed countries have no moral authority to demand anything on this issue.

Paradoxically, the countries that have caused the least global warming, particularly the small island states and the least developed countries, are the most vulnerable and threatened. For them to implement adaptation policies they need unrestricted access to clean technologies and to financing.

However, the developed countries are the ones monopolizing the patents, the technologies and the money. They are, therefore, responsible for the Third World to gain access to substantial amounts of fresh funding above the current Official Development Assistance levels, which are completely insufficient in fact. They must also be held accountable for the effective free transfer of technologies and the training of human resources in our countries – something which, of course, will not be resolved through the market or the neoliberal policies imposed through pressure and blackmail.

And the largest responsibility lies, without a doubt, with the country that most squanders, the one that most pollutes, the one that has the most money and technologies – which, at the same time, refuses to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and has not shown any commitment at all to this meeting convened by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Mr. President:

Cuba is hopeful that the forthcoming Bali Conference will produce a clear mandate for the developed countries to reduce, by 2020, their emissions by no less than 40% as compared to their 1990 levels; a mandate negotiated within the framework of the Convention and not in small cliques and selective collusions as proposed by the Government of the United States.

Cuba also expects that a mechanism be adopted to ensure the expeditious transfer to the underdeveloped countries of clean technologies under preferential terms, with the utmost priority to the small island states and the least developed countries, which are the most vulnerable.

We also expect that new and additional resources be allocated, and that financial support mechanisms be adopted to assist the underdeveloped countries in implementing our adaptation strategies. By way of example, if only half the money that our countries must pay every year in servicing a burdensome debt that does not cease to grow were set aside for these purposes, we would have over US\$ 200 billion per annum. Another alternative would be to earmark merely the tenth of what the sole military superpower on the planet spends on wars and weapons and we would have another US\$ 50 billion available. The money is there, but political will is lacking.

Mr. President:

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has called upon us today to send a powerful political message to the forthcoming Bali Conference. I find no better way to say it on Cuba's behalf than to repeat Fidel's words that 12 June 1992:

“Let selfishness end, let hegemonies end, let insensitivity, irresponsibility and deceit end. Tomorrow it will be too late to do what we should have done a long time ago.”

Thank you very much.