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Socialist Voice #265, August 11, 2008

The Siege of Gaza: Israel Uses Hitler's Methods Against Palestinians

By Suzanne Weiss

The following is the text of a talk by Socialist Voice Contributing Editor Suzanne Weiss to a joint meeting of Muslim and Jewish supporters of Palestinian rights at the Taric Islamic Centre in Toronto, on June 14, 2008.

This article is also available in Spanish at <http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=71508>

This inspiring meeting seeks to reach out to Jewish and Muslim communities, to build understanding of the conflict in the Middle East. Thank you for the honour of inviting me to participate.

My life has been shaped by the Jewish Holocaust under Hitler. My mother died in Auschwitz, and I barely escaped the same fate. Like many others, I have sought to resist the forces of war and oppression that we saw in Nazism and that still live on. We have won victories, such as the destruction of apartheid in South Africa.

But today we see the methods of Nazism being employed against the Palestinians, with the ultimate aim of wiping them out as a people. And this horror is justified with reference to the victims of the Holocaust. What a lie!

It is Israel that uses many of the methods of Nazism to oppress the Palestinians. Meanwhile the Palestinian resistance struggle stands in continuity with the resistance of my people and others in Europe to Nazism.

The primary aim of the Nazi Holocaust was ethnic cleansing — to rid Germany and the territories it occupied of all Jewish people. The Nazis considered shipping the Jewish people outside of Europe, but found no way to do this and decided to kill them all. The Jews were

driven from their homes, robbed of their belongings, herded into ghettos, and sent by millions to the gas chambers.

The Holocaust is one of the best documented historical events of all time. The Nazis were methodical — they counted their victims and kept meticulous records. In my family's Polish home town of Piotrkow there were 30,000 Jews. Only 100 survived. On the train that took my mother to Auschwitz there were 1,000 Jews, of whom only ten survived. There is no denying the truth of this deplorable chapter of human history.

Another historical fact that cannot be denied is al-Nakba, the catastrophe inflicted on the Palestinians by the Zionists in 1948. The basic idea was the same: ethnic cleansing. Dispossess the Palestinians and drive them from their homes and lands. The Zionists did not aim to kill *all* the Palestinians — only to kill *enough* to expel them and seize their homeland.

Zionist historians invented a story of a massive “voluntary” exodus of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, who, the Zionists said, had decided temporarily to leave their homes and villages to make way for the invading Arab armies. This is a big lie. It is as dishonest and absurd as Hitler's stories of how the Jews supposedly started the Second World War. In fact, the Palestinian expulsions began in 1948 in conditions of peace.

The Zionists and their allies displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, stole their traditionally agricultural land, and made them homeless. They did this with the aid of mass killings.

The Zionists' aim is to remove Palestine from the world's family of nations. They hope that the world will forget that a Palestinian people ever existed. That is the Zionist “final solution” for the Palestinians.

That, too, is a form of genocide and it continues today.

Let me tell you a few things that the Nazis did in Piotrkow, my family's home town in Poland. You will find it very similar to what is going on today in Gaza and the West Bank.

The German Gestapo and its allies expelled the Jewish people of Piotrkow from society and confined them in a ghetto, surrounded by an immense wall. The idea was to keep everyone on both sides of the wall ignorant, to segregate the lepers, the Jewish people, so that the Nazis could do their dirty murderous deeds in secret.

Inside the ghetto, the Jews were deprived of essentials of life and prevented from entering or leaving. They were harassed and humiliated at checkpoints. Thousands were killed arbitrarily, including the innocent children.

The Piotrkow ghetto swelled and became increasingly crowded as Jewish people from other cities of Poland were herded into it. Ghetto conditions deteriorated. Housing was shockingly overcrowded, and sanitary conditions extremely bad. Epidemics began to spread.

There was a Jewish government and Jewish police in the ghetto, but they were controlled by the Nazi authorities. Some Jewish leaders, including a member of my family, Yakov Berliner, organized resistance, but they were hunted down and executed.

To anyone who knows conditions in Palestine today, all this sounds very familiar.

Today the vast majority of Palestinians have been dispossessed and driven from their lands. In occupied Palestine, the people are confined to small enclaves, surrounded by high walls and intimidating checkpoints. They are humiliated, even forced to crawl naked. Gaza resembles Hitler's ghettos. The Palestinians are sealed off and deprived of the necessities of life.

There is a Palestinian Authority, but its power is limited by the Zionists. The Palestinian police, trained by the enemies of their people including the Canadian government, are used to repress the population. Palestinians suffer continual persecution and humiliation. They cannot earn a livelihood and must endure life-threatening poverty.

The Palestinians suffer unprovoked and arbitrary attacks, demolition and bombings of their homes and villages. Leaders of the Palestinian resistance are hunted down and slaughtered.

In Gaza, the Palestinians have been able to maintain a government established in free elections. For this crime, they are placed under siege and bombarded.

Israel's deputy defense minister, Matan Vilnai, has made a horrifying threat against the people of Gaza. Young Palestinians use the only means of defense at their disposal. It doesn't compare to the bombs and tanks destroying their society. The Palestinian people have inalienable rights to defend themselves, their land, and property through whatever means they can, including through their democratically elected government, Hamas. Yet Vilnai has said, if rocket fire intensifies, "they will bring upon themselves (the Palestinians) a bigger holocaust because we will use all our might to defend ourselves."

A bigger holocaust — the reference to Hitler's actions is clear. This means that Israel will attempt to physically wipe the Gaza population off the map.

Powerful forces have tried to erase the crime against the Palestinians from the world's public memory. But the Palestinian people have survived, and their resistance continues, with the sympathy of peoples around the world. The truth about the crime against the Palestinians cannot be silenced.

The Zionists misuse the memory of the holocaust to breed and justify new wars in the Middle East. This is a crime against the memory of my family and other Jewish victims under Hitler.

The Zionists act with strong support from the United States, which has its own criminal reasons to see the Palestinians defeated. The Zionists want their exclusively Jewish state, and they want it to expand and dominate the region. The United States, with Ottawa's support, wants the oil and other resources; it wants to control all of the Middle East. That's why they conduct war in Iraq and Afghanistan and are menacing Iran.

To be against the government of Israel is not anti-Semitic. We must stand up for justice and for humanity. We oppose the system of Zionism that oppresses one people — the Palestinians — and endangers another — the Israeli Jews — while condemning them to the hatred of the world.

If the crime against the Palestinians prevails, it would mean that Hitler's spirit had triumphed. To be true to the memory of the victims of the Jewish Holocaust and of all Hitler's victims, we must defend the Palestinians.

We must join their resistance struggle to win back their homeland. We can do this here in Canada.

We need a united campaign for peace and justice for Palestine, for a society in which all inhabitants, Jewish and Palestinians, have an equal voice and equal rights. All the Palestinians expelled from the country should have the right to return.

During Hitler's time, world governments silently supported these crimes against the Jewish people — including the Canadian government, which refused to accept Jewish immigrants escaping the Holocaust. Today, we cannot allow silence about the crimes perpetrated on the Palestinian people. We must demand justice from our own governments.

I belong to "Not in Our Name (NION): Jewish Voice Against Zionism," and I am also with the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA). These organizations support the Palestinian right to return and to regain their homeland. They call for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against Israeli Apartheid policies.

The day will come that the Apartheid wall will fall and we will see the liberation of the Palestinians. It will be a new day for freedom for all of us around the world.

Let us work together for that day of liberation.

Freedom for the Palestinians!

See also:

- *Not in Our Name: Jewish Voices Opposing Zionism* <<http://www.nion.ca/>>
- *Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid* <<http://www.caiaweb.org/>>

Socialist Voice #266, August 18, 2008

Bolivia: Historic Vote Confirms Will for Change

By Federico Fuentes

With 99% of the votes counted, Bolivia's first indigenous president won a crushing 67.43% majority in the August 10 recall referendum. Surpassing the 53.7% he received in the 2005 national elections, which until then was the highest vote recorded by a presidential candidate in Bolivia's history, the result confirmed the broad support for the Morales government's project for wide-ranging social change.

The vote was one of multiple referendums on whether to ratify or recall the president, vice-president, and eight of the nine departmental prefects (governors), held in an attempt to break the deadlock caused by opposition to the process of change by the right-wing oligarchy whose base of support lies in Bolivia's resource-rich and predominantly white eastern region.

Relationship of forces

The vote not only ratified Morales and Vice-President Álvaro García Linera in their posts, it also revoked the mandates of two opposition prefects, José Paredes in La Paz and Manfred Villa Reyes in Cochabamba. Their positions will undoubtedly be filled in the upcoming elections by prefects aligned with the government, increasing the number of prefects from Morales's Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) from two to four.

The vote has confirmed that Morales has maintained wide support among the middle classes, and it reflected growing class struggle in the east, where Morales's vote dramatically increased, refuting the notion that the government's support is limited to the west.

At the same time, however, the project of "autonomy" promoted by the oligarchy in the "half moon" — the four eastern departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija — was bolstered by the victory of pro-autonomy prefects in those departments.

Coming out of the referendums, a new political configuration has emerged, which many hope will open up space for an agreement between the competing social blocs on integrating the autonomy statutes proposed by the eastern prefects with the new draft constitution (drawn up by pro-government delegates in the Constituent Assembly after right-wing delegates boycotted Assembly sessions).

The challenge now is for the government to use its powerful electoral majority to overcome what many commentators have referred to as a "catastrophic deadlock" and open the path towards the "new Bolivia" sought by the indigenous majority and other oppressed sectors and violently opposed by the oligarchy.

When the initiative for the recall referendums came from Morales in December as a way to break this deadlock, the main opposition party, Podemos, refused to approve it and used its Senate majority to stall the project.

However five months later, when the eastern prefects took the initiative through a wave of autonomy referendums, Podemos moved to regain leadership of the opposition by accepting the recall vote proposal.

The oligarchy regroupes

Behind the push for autonomy is the desire of large landowners and gas transnationals to shield the natural resources and agribusiness interests in the east from the government's nationalization and land reform projects.

As the Morales government has advanced in its project to re-establish state control over natural resources—including the May 1, 2006, nationalization of Bolivia's gas reserves—the elites located in the east have worked to build a regional pro-autonomy movement. This project aims to give the prefects legislative power over taxation, natural resources, land distribution, and trade agreements.

Not only do they hope to take decision-making power over these questions out of the hands of the central government, they aim to undermine Morales's project and his base of support in order to pave the way for his removal, either at the ballot box or by violent means.

Facing a new draft constitution that enshrines state control over natural resources and dramatically expands the rights of indigenous people, the oligarchy is fighting tooth and nail to defend its interests against a national movement driven by the indigenous peoples.

The right wing's confidence was boosted in the aftermath of unconstitutional referendums on the question of autonomy organized in the eastern departments during June and July, against the opposition of the central government. The departmental authorities announced massive victories in votes that were in fact marred by right-wing violence and high abstention rates.

The pro-autonomy prefects then shifted from their initial rejection of the recall referendums and agreed to participate, as their anti-government project seemed to be expanding with the victory of an opposition candidate in the elections for prefect of Chuquisaca. (The former prefect, who is aligned with MAS, is currently in exile in Peru following a wave of racist attacks and violent protests against the constituent assembly, which met in Sucre, the state capital and constitutional capital of Bolivia.)

Violent campaign

Yet as August 10 approached and polls predicted a large victory for Morales, most of the media began to comment on the lack of any serious political campaign by the opposition for an anti-Morales vote. Instead, the week leading up to the vote saw an intensification of violent and racist right-wing attacks.

These involved mobilizing fascist youth to attack indigenous people in the cities, blockading airports to stop Morales from campaigning in the east and the attempted assassination of a government minister. These rightist forces even sent small groups of right-wing thugs wearing balaclavas to the airport in Tarija, forcing postponement of a scheduled meeting of Morales with

the presidents of Venezuela and Argentina. The mayor of Santa Cruz called on the military to overthrow Morales because he was “useless.”

But there were only isolated incidents on the day of the referendums. While the vote affirmed strong support for the prefects in the east, it also confirmed the emergence of “the other Santa Cruz” — forces in the opposition’s heartland that oppose the project of the elites.

In Santa Cruz, Ruben Costas was ratified as prefect with 66% of the vote, while Ernesto Suarez in Beni received 64%, Mario Cossio in Tarija 58% and Leopoldo Suarez in Pando 56%.

At the same time, Morales scored 52% in Pando, just under 50% in Tarija, and his support in Beni jumped from less than 20% in December 2005 to 44%. He also received the not insignificant total of 40% support in Santa Cruz.

Only in Chuquisaca was Morales’s vote lower than in 2005, but it was still a solid 54%.

While it was still a long way from the remarkable results of 80% support in the departments of La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí, 70% in Cochabamba, and the 90% achieved almost everywhere among rural electorates, the results in the east represent an important advance for the government.

Challenges

Speaking from the balcony of the presidential palace in front of thousands of supporters, Morales declared that the vote was a mandate “to continue advancing in the recovery of natural resources, in the recovery and nationalization of companies.”

Morales called the vote a mandate to unite all Bolivians, east and west, rich and poor — a mandate that would be applied at all the different levels, sectors and regions of the country.

“I call on all the prefects to work for the unity of Bolivians and to work respecting Bolivian norms ... The people want the prefects to be part of the nationalization of other natural resources,” Morales declared.

Morales called a meeting of all prefects to discuss how to integrate autonomy statutes into the new constitution.

The conciliatory tone of Morales’s speech, which was well received by most Bolivians, contrasted sharply with the confrontational stance of the eastern prefects.

Costas declared that the vote had ratified a *de facto* autonomy and a rejection of the “racist” (read: indigenous) constitution that the “monkey” (Morales) wants to impose through “state terrorism,” as crowds gathered in the centre of Santa Cruz to celebrate the “recall” of Morales in this region — chanting that “Evo will never set foot in Santa Cruz again.”

Toning down their rhetoric in the following days, the other prefects announced they had agreed to come to the negotiating table and discuss with Morales a way to combine the two projects.

The meeting took place on August 14. The government proposed attempting to make the new constitution and autonomy statutes compatible, reaching agreement on the designation of magistrates for the constitutional tribunal and the national electoral court, and discussing the

question of the national “direct tax on hydrocarbons.” (Despite massive windfalls from the tax following the gas nationalization, the opposition has rejected government attempts to use part of this tax to fund the new pension scheme.)

Immediately afterwards, the prefects from the eastern departments flew to Santa Cruz where they announced their rejection of the government’s proposal and called for a “civic stoppage” on August 19. With no legal basis whatsoever, Costa announced plans for elections to a legislative assembly in “the autonomous department of Santa Cruz” for next January 25.

Meanwhile, the violent campaign in the east has continued. On August 13, six youths threw 10 Molotov cocktails into the headquarters of the Centre for Legal Studies and Social Investigation (CEJIS), which provides legal advice to indigenous and peasant organizations and is the home organization of some Morales cabinet members.

“I feel that the prefects only want money and do not want to touch the political question,” said Morales after the meeting. “If we interpret the sentiment expressed through the recall referendums, the Bolivian people want profound changes in the structural and especially in the political sphere. That is why I have come to the conclusion that the Bolivian people want autonomy and a new constitution.”

Morales’s vice-minister for decentralization, Fabian Yaksic, added that the government would propose another referendum “where the people would settle the question as to whether the autonomy proposed in the new constitution is the one that most benefits the country, or whether the autonomy proposal reflected in the regional statutes [promoted by the eastern authorities] does.”

Other, more hard-line voices from the radical sectors of the MAS are calling for tough measures against forces in the east that continue to violate the law. During Morales’s victory speech, important sections of the crowd began to chant: “Now, for sure, it’s time to be heavy handed.”

Federico Fuentes is the editor of Bolivia Rising (<http://boliviarising.blogspot.com>).

Socialist Voice #267, August 24, 2008

The Myth of the Tragedy of the Commons

By Ian Angus

Will shared resources always be misused and overused? Is community ownership of land, forests and fisheries a guaranteed road to ecological disaster? Is privatization the only way to protect the environment and end Third World poverty? Most economists and development planners will answer “yes” — and for proof they will point to the most influential article ever written on those important questions.

Since its publication in *Science* in December 1968, “The Tragedy of the Commons” has been anthologized in at least 111 books, making it one of the most-reprinted articles ever to appear in any scientific journal. It is also one of the most-quoted: a recent Google search found “about 302,000” results for the phrase “tragedy of the commons.”

For 40 years it has been, in the words of a World Bank Discussion Paper, “the dominant paradigm within which social scientists assess natural resource issues.” (Bromley and Cernea 1989: 6) It has been used time and again to justify stealing indigenous peoples’ lands, privatizing health care and other social services, giving corporations ‘tradable permits’ to pollute the air and water, and much more.

Noted anthropologist Dr. G.N. Appell (1995) writes that the article “has been embraced as a sacred text by scholars and professionals in the practice of designing futures for others and imposing their own economic and environmental rationality on other social systems of which they have incomplete understanding and knowledge.”

Like most sacred texts, “The Tragedy of the Commons” is more often cited than read. As we will see, although its title sounds authoritative and scientific, it fell far short of science.

Garrett Hardin hatches a myth

The author of “The Tragedy of the Commons” was Garrett Hardin, a University of California professor who until then was best-known as the author of a biology textbook that argued for “control of breeding” of “genetically defective” people. (Hardin 1966: 707) In his 1968 essay he argued that communities that share resources inevitably pave the way for their own destruction; instead of wealth for all, there is wealth for none.

He based his argument on a story about the commons in rural England.

(The term “commons” was used in England to refer to the shared pastures, fields, forests, irrigation systems and other resources that were found in many rural areas until well into the 1800s. Similar communal farming arrangements existed in most of Europe, and they still exist today in various forms around the world, particularly in indigenous communities.)

“Picture a pasture open to all,” Hardin wrote. A herdsman who wants to expand his personal herd will calculate that the cost of additional grazing (reduced food for all animals, rapid soil

depletion) will be divided among all, but he alone will get the benefit of having more cattle to sell.

Inevitably, “the rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd.” But every “rational herdsman” will do the same thing, so the commons is soon overstocked and overgrazed to the point where it supports no animals at all.

Hardin used the word “tragedy” as Aristotle did, to refer to a dramatic outcome that is the inevitable but unplanned result of a character’s actions. He called the destruction of the commons through overuse a tragedy not because it is sad, but because it is the *inevitable result of shared use of the pasture*. “Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.”

Where’s the evidence?

Given the subsequent influence of Hardin’s essay, it’s shocking to realize that he provided *no evidence at all* to support his sweeping conclusions. He claimed that the “tragedy” was inevitable — but he didn’t show that it had happened even once.

Hardin simply ignored what actually happens in a real commons: *self-regulation by the communities involved*. One such process was described years earlier in Friedrich Engels’ account of the “mark,” the form taken by commons-based communities in parts of pre-capitalist Germany:

“[T]he use of arable and meadowlands was under the supervision and direction of the community ...

“Just as the share of each member in so much of the mark as was distributed was of equal size, so was his share also in the use of the ‘common mark.’ The nature of this use was determined by the members of the community as a whole. ...

“At fixed times and, if necessary, more frequently, they met in the open air to discuss the affairs of the mark and to sit in judgment upon breaches of regulations and disputes concerning the mark.” (Engels 1892)

Historians and other scholars have broadly confirmed Engels’ description of communal management of shared resources. A summary of recent research concludes:

“[W]hat existed in fact was not a ‘tragedy of the commons’ but rather a triumph: that for hundreds of years — and perhaps thousands, although written records do not exist to prove the longer era — land was managed successfully by communities.” (Cox 1985: 60)

Part of that self-regulation process was known in England as “stinting” — establishing limits for the number of cows, pigs, sheep and other livestock that each commoner could graze on the common pasture. Such “stints” protected the land from overuse (a concept that experienced farmers understood long before Hardin arrived) and allowed the community to allocate resources according to its own concepts of fairness.

The only significant cases of overstocking found by the leading modern expert on the English commons involved wealthy landowners who deliberately put too many animals onto the pasture

in order to weaken their much poorer neighbours' position in disputes over the enclosure (privatization) of common lands. (Neeson 1993: 156)

Hardin assumed that peasant farmers are unable to change their behaviour in the face of certain disaster. But in the real world, small farmers, fishers and others have created their own institutions and rules for preserving resources and ensuring that the commons community survived through good years and bad.

Why does the herder want more?

Hardin's argument started with the unproven assertion that herdsmen always want to expand their herds: "It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. ... As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain."

In short, Hardin's conclusion was predetermined by his assumptions. "It is to be expected" that each herdsman will try to maximize the size of his herd — and each one does exactly that. It's a circular argument that proves nothing.

Hardin assumed that human nature is selfish and unchanging, and that society is just an assemblage of self-interested individuals who don't care about the impact of their actions on the community. The same idea, explicitly or implicitly, is a fundamental component of mainstream (i.e., pro-capitalist) economic theory.

All the evidence (not to mention common sense) shows that this is absurd: people are social beings, and society is much more than the arithmetic sum of its members. Even capitalist society, which rewards the most anti-social behaviour, has not crushed human cooperation and solidarity. The very fact that for centuries "rational herdsmen" did not overgraze the commons disproves Hardin's most fundamental assumptions — but that hasn't stopped him or his disciples from erecting policy castles on foundations of sand.

Even if the herdsman wanted to behave as Hardin described, he couldn't do so unless certain conditions existed.

There would have to be a market for the cattle, and he would have to be focused on producing for that market, not for local consumption. He would have to have enough capital to buy the additional cattle and the fodder they would need in winter. He would have to be able to hire workers to care for the larger herd, build bigger barns, etc. And his desire for profit would have to outweigh his interest in the long-term survival of his community.

In short, Hardin didn't describe the behaviour of herdsmen in pre-capitalist farming communities — he described the behaviour of *capitalists operating in a capitalist economy*. The universal human nature that he claimed would always destroy common resources is actually the profit-driven "grow or die" behaviour of corporations.

Will private ownership do better?

That leads us to another fatal flaw in Hardin's argument: in addition to providing no evidence that maintaining the commons will inevitably destroy the environment, he offered no

justification for his opinion that privatization would save it. Once again he simply presented his own prejudices as fact:

“We must admit that our legal system of private property plus inheritance is unjust — but we put up with it because we are not convinced, at the moment, that anyone has invented a better system. The alternative of the commons is too horrifying to contemplate. Injustice is preferable to total ruin.”

The implication is that private owners will do a better job of caring for the environment because they want to preserve the value of their assets. In reality, scholars and activists have documented scores of cases in which the division and privatization of communally managed lands had disastrous results. Privatizing the commons has repeatedly led to deforestation, soil erosion and depletion, overuse of fertilizers and pesticides, and the ruin of ecosystems.

As Karl Marx wrote, nature requires long cycles of birth, development and regeneration, but capitalism requires short-term returns.

“[T]he entire spirit of capitalist production, which is oriented towards the most immediate monetary profits, stands in contradiction to agriculture, which has to concern itself with the whole gamut of permanent conditions of life required by the chain of human generations. A striking illustration of this is furnished by the forests, which are only rarely managed in a way more or less corresponding to the interests of society as a whole...” (Marx 1998: 611n)

Contrary to Hardin’s claims, a community that shares fields and forests has a strong incentive to protect them to the best of its ability, even if that means not maximizing current production, because those resources will be essential to the community’s survival for centuries to come. Capitalist owners have the opposite incentive, because they will not survive in business if they don’t maximize short-term profit. If ethanol promises bigger and faster profits than centuries-old rain forests, the trees will fall.

This focus on short-term gain has reached a point of appalling absurdity in recent best-selling books by Bjorn Lomborg, William Nordhaus and others, who argue that it is irrational to spend money to stop greenhouse gas emissions today, because the payoff is too far in the future. Other investments, they say, will produce much better returns, more quickly.

Community management isn’t an infallible way of protecting shared resources: some communities have mismanaged common resources, and some commons may have been overused to extinction. But no commons-based community has capitalism’s built-in drive to put current profits ahead of the well-being of future generations.

A politically useful myth

The truly appalling thing about “The Tragedy of the Commons” is not its lack of evidence or logic — badly researched and argued articles are not unknown in academic journals. What’s shocking is the fact that *this* piece of reactionary nonsense has been hailed as a brilliant analysis of the causes of human suffering and environmental destruction, and adopted as a basis for social

policy by supposed experts ranging from economists and environmentalists to governments and United Nations agencies.

Despite being refuted again and again, it is still used today to support private ownership and uncontrolled markets as sure-fire roads to economic growth.

The success of Hardin's argument reflects its usefulness as a pseudo-scientific explanation of global poverty and inequality, an explanation that doesn't question the dominant social and political order. It confirms the prejudices of those in power: logical and factual errors are nothing compared to the very attractive (to the rich) claim that the poor are responsible for their own poverty. The fact that Hardin's argument also blames the poor for ecological destruction is a bonus.

Hardin's essay has been widely used as an ideological response to anti-imperialist movements in the Third World and discontent among indigenous and other oppressed peoples everywhere in the world.

“Hardin's fable was taken up by the gathering forces of neo-liberal reaction in the 1970s, and his essay became the ‘scientific’ foundation of World Bank and IMF policies, viz. enclosure of commons and privatization of public property. ... The message is clear: we must never treat the earth as a ‘common treasury.’ We must be ruthless and greedy or else we will perish.” (Boal 2007)

In Canada, conservative lobbyists use arguments derived from Hardin's political tract to explain away poverty on First Nations' reserves, and to argue for further dismantling of indigenous communities. A study published by the influential Fraser Institute urges privatization of reserve land:

“[T]hese large amounts of land, with their attendant natural resources, will never yield their maximum benefit to Canada's native people as long as they are held as collective property subject to political management. ... collective property is the path of poverty, and private property is the path of prosperity.” (Fraser 2002: 16-17)

This isn't just right-wing posturing. Canada's federal government, which has refused to sign the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, announced in 2007 that it will “develop approaches to support the development of individual property ownership on reserves,” and created a \$300 million fund to do just that.

In Hardin's world, poverty has nothing to do with centuries of racism, colonialism and exploitation: poverty is inevitable and natural in all times and places, the product of immutable human nature. The poor bring it on themselves by having too many babies and clinging to self-destructive collectivism.

The tragedy of the commons is a useful political myth — a scientific-sounding way of saying that there is no alternative to the dominant world order.

Stripped of excess verbiage, Hardin's essay asserted, without proof, that human beings are helpless prisoners of biology and the market. Unless restrained, we will inevitably destroy our

communities and environment for a few extra pennies of profit. There is nothing we can do to make the world better or more just.

In 1844 Friedrich Engels described a similar argument as a “repulsive blasphemy against man and nature.” Those words apply with full force to the myth of the tragedy of the commons.

Ian Angus is editor of Climate and Capitalism and an associate editor of Socialist Voice

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Update: A reply to criticisms and questions about this article.

<https://climateandcapitalism.com/2008/11/03/once-again-the-myth-of-the-tragedy-of-the-commons/>

Socialist Voice #268, August 26, 2008

The Struggle in Amazonia: A Clash of Cultures and Philosophies

By Hugo Blanco

Introduction, by Ian Angus

On August 22, Indigenous people in the Amazon rain forest areas of Peru celebrated a victory in their struggle against laws that promote privatization of communally owned land.

Last October, the country's right-wing president, Alan García, outraged Indigenous communities by saying their refusal to permit exploitation of timber, oil and minerals on their lands was a result of "taboo, laziness, indolence or the law of the gardener's dog that says: 'If I don't do it, no one can.'" Garcia continued:

"In addition to real peasant communities, there are artificial communities that have title to 200 thousand hectares but farm only 10 thousand hectares, leaving the rest idle, while the people, who live in extreme poverty, look to the state for help."

"The anti-capitalist communist of the 19th Century, who disguised himself as a protectionist in the 20th Century, has in the 21st Century adopted the cloak of environmentalism. But always anti-capitalist, anti-investment..."[1]

García's neoliberal goal is elimination of Indigenous communal property rights in the Amazon basin, releasing this environmentally sensitive area for development of timber, oil and minerals with an estimated value of 3.5 billion dollars.

Under Peru's 1979 Constitution, communally-owned land could not be sold. That clause was removed by the notorious Fujimori government in 1993; the only remaining legal protection was a law that requires a two-thirds vote of the community involved before land could be sold or leased. This year, García took a further step towards privatization, reducing the requirement to a simple majority vote. He made the change unilaterally, using powers granted to him by Congress to implement the recently-signed free trade agreement with the United States.

On August 9, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, some 700 members of the Aguaruna Indigenous community occupied an oil pumping station in the Peruvian Amazon region, demanding repeal of the new laws and restoration of the provisions of the 1979 constitution. Similar occupations, road blockades, and strikes quickly spread across the forest regions of Peru, involving some 12,000 people in 63 communities.

There were clashes between police and protestors in a number of areas, including the city of Bagua Chica, where urban dwellers joined with Indigenous forces to expel the police from the town. On August 18, García declared a state of emergency, suspending civil liberties, banning public meetings in three provinces, and sending in 1,500 armed soldiers.

García refused to negotiate with the protestors, but growing popular outrage forced members of Congress to intervene. On Friday, August 22, the Congress voted 66 to 29 to disallow García's decrees. It remains to be seen whether the repeal will hold, since under the constitution García can send the law back to Congress with revisions, and he still has emergency powers.

Nevertheless, news reports say that there has been widespread celebration in the forest areas.

The following statement was distributed in Peru by supporters of the newspaper *Lucha Indígena* (Indigenous Struggle), shortly before the Congress vote. It was written by Hugo Blanco, the legendary peasant leader in the mountainous Cuzco region. For more information about Blanco and the Indigenous movement in South and Central America, see the links at the end of the article.

Translation Note: In this article, Hugo Blanco uses the phrase “Buen Vivir,” which translates literally as “Living Well” but implies much more. A central concept in the Andes Indigenous world vision, it has been defined by Bolivian president Evo Morales as “Thinking not only in terms of income per capita but of cultural identity, community, and harmony among ourselves and with our Mother Earth.”

Rosalía Paiva, the Quechua liberation activist and author who suggested this quotation from Morales, adds the following information:

“Our brother Hugo, in writing of Buen Vivir, is referring to Sumak Kausay or Allin Kausay. This was a central element in the lives of our Inca ancestors. Allin Kausay means to live in harmony with yourself, with the natural world, and with society. Allin means ‘splendid,’ Kausay means ‘life,’ or, better, ‘existence.’ Allin Kausay is composed of a diversity of factors including knowledge, ethical and spiritual codes of conduct, the relationship with the environment, human values, and the vision of the future. In this sense, it is a category that is in constant development in the life of Andean/Amazonian peoples.”

**The Struggle in Amazonia:
A Clash of Cultures and Philosophies**

Alan García's philosophy of “progress” and the “gardener's dog”— against the philosophy of Buen Vivir, solidarity, and respect for nature.

By Hugo Blanco, August 2008

Translated for Socialist Voice by Ian Angus and John Riddel

For millennia, the rain forest has been inhabited by native communities, who over many years learned from nature how to live there.

They domesticated plants and adapted them for human consumption, including such species as papayas and cassava.

They knew how to heal: from them the world learned about quinine, which saved the life of the future Sun King of France. They taught us about Cat's Claw and many other natural medicines.[2]

They know how to cultivate the land without destroying the thin and fragile layer of fertile soil. Copying nature, they cultivate different species with different life cycles together in a small area. Then after a time they move their agriculture elsewhere, returning the land they had been using to the forest.

They do not need to raise cattle, which is destructive; they fish and hunt.

They do not separate work from relaxation. They go for a stroll, and when they find something to hunt, they do so. They harvest wild fruits. If, as they pass through cultivated areas, they find something that is ripe they pick it; if something needs fixing, they fix it; if there is something to plant, they plant it.

They are not "owners" of the earth, they are its children.

Five centuries ago the European invaders came. Since then they and their descendants have been going into the forest to destroy it.

The first of the great invading predators sought rubber. Then came the big landowners who cleared the jungle for destructive plantations and even more destructive ranching, gold prospectors, loggers, and now the devastating oil companies.

Many natives have been adversely affected to a greater or lesser degree by the capitalist invasion. Some have fled contact with the civilization that destroyed their essential living space, that enslaved and murdered them, that exposed them to contagious diseases they had never known before.

Today the invaders are attacking the jungle primarily to extract oil and gas, but they are also cutting down forests for timber and to clear land for livestock. They are cutting and burning to impose new types of agriculture.

Killing the jungle will kill its native peoples.

Killing the Amazon will kill the lungs of the world.

We defend our Amazonian brothers who are defending the world.

The invaders claim their aggression is legal, justifying it with "laws" that they wrote while excluding Indigenous people from participation or consultation.

These laws "recognize" that the surface area belongs to the native communities, but not the wealth beneath the soil, which belongs to the invaders' state.

Alan García said that the natives are "the gardener's dog" who doesn't eat the plants and won't let others eat — so we must give way to multinational companies. Most recently he issued a series of decrees that allow "unproductive lands" to be seized — to hand them over, of course, to the big business predators in the name of "progress," promoting the "legal" destruction of the rain forest.

Those who think they are white discriminate against Indigenous people from the highlands. Those who are considered white, creole or non-Indigenous, together with whites and Indigenous people from the highlands, discriminate against the natives of the rain forest, calling them “savages.”

Now, those who are discriminated against by other victims of discrimination are teaching the country’s exploited majority how to respond to attacks by big business and by Alan García and its other servants.

In various parts of the jungle, they have risen up peacefully and massively to block the continued attacks on the Amazon region. They have crippled oil extraction and electrical production.

The government has declared a state of emergency in those areas.

It has sent armed police to counter this “illegal” activity, but the natives have peacefully disarmed them.

There have been clashes with police in several areas.

The military is publicly preparing to attack the civilian population, which will lead to deaths and injuries.

The natives want to be masters of their future. They will decide what should be kept from the past and what aspects of the present should be adopted.

What they have taught us

- That it is not enough to challenge the validity of the oppressors’ laws; we must respond with action.
- That we need to act simultaneously in several areas.
- That it is possible to disarm the repressive forces.

How will the fight continue?

This depends on the actions of the other exploited people in the country, and on solidarity from abroad.

If they stand alone, it’s likely that Alan García will murder them, as his long record of criminal actions demonstrates.

If we join their struggle, they will win and their triumph will be ours. It will lift our spirits and encourage the poor people of Peru to follow in their footsteps.

We likewise prefer Buen Vivir, albeit in our own way and not that of the rain forest. Although we can see it only in outline, we are confident that *it will be based on collectivist principles, on solidarity, on our past and other aspects of our cultural heritage, on love and respect for nature whose children we are.*

We know that this pits us against the so-called “progress” that causes global warming and the extinction of the human species, including:

- The poisoning of water and soil by multinational oil and mining companies.
- The poisoning of rivers, lakes and seas by other industrial activity.
- The thinning of the ozone layer that protects us from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays.
- Atomic energy.
- Agrochemicals.
- Agrofuels.
- Genetically modified foods.
- And more.

Support the culture of life that our brothers in the jungle are struggling for!

Crush the culture of death defended by multinational corporations and their servant Alan García!

Related Reading

- *The Fight for Indigenous Rights in the Andes Today* by Hugo Blanco (Socialist Voice pamphlet)
- *From Resistance to Power! Manifestos of the fight for Indigenous Rights in Central and South America* (Socialist Voice pamphlet)

Footnotes

[1] Alan García, "El síndrome del perro del hortelano." *El Comercio*, 28 October 2007. The term "gardener's dog" comes from a Peruvian proverb similar to the English expression "dog in the manger." The gardener's dog doesn't wish to eat the cabbage, and won't let anyone else eat it either.

[2] Cat's Claw (*Uncaria tomentosa*) is an anti-inflammatory herb used in Peru since Inca times to treat a variety of illnesses.