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Socialist Voice #432, May 1, 2010

Preparing a new International: 'Anti-imperialism should be the common element that brings us all together'

A LeftViews interview with Julio Chávez

Julio Chávez is a member of the international committee of the congress of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which is charged with drafting a specific plan of action to form a new socialist international. He was interviewed by Kiraz Janicke and Federico Fuentes.

The interview was originally published in Venezuelanalysis.com under the title "The First Socialist International of the 21st Century." It has been edited for Socialist Voice by Richard Fidler.

The proposal that President Hugo Chávez made regarding the formation of a Fifth Socialist International has attracted a lot of attention at a global level. We're interested in your point of view, as a delegate and member of the International Committee of the Congress of the PSUV: Why propose a Fifth International and what is the importance of this proposal?

I believe that the proposal launched by President Hugo Chávez – to raise at this time a global debate on the historical relevance of the need; to call on all parties, movements and leftist and anti-imperialist currents in the world to have a full discussion – is based on the characterization and in-depth analysis of the crisis of global capitalism. This leads unquestionably to the conclusion that the only way to overcome the cyclical crisis of world capitalism is, in fact, by proposing a model or a path that is completely different from the neoliberal model, the predatory model, of capitalism. There is no alternative other than the path of transition to socialism.

We believe that discussion of a transitional program – a great debate – should be happening this year in Caracas due to the role that Venezuela is playing as the epicentre of the great transformations that have occurred since the beginning of this century, and which have motivated

and enthused the peoples of our America, and also because of the leading role that Venezuela and President Hugo Chávez are playing at the global level.

We think it is necessary as well because of the aggressive policy of U.S. imperialism toward Venezuela: the installation of military bases, reactivation of the Fourth Fleet, and the media campaign of attacks and insults against both the revolutionary process and the leader of this process. For all these reasons, we believe it is appropriate to call for an organization which would have Caracas as the epicentre; for a great global debate about the need to advance on a proposal to overcome the contradiction between capital and labour.

The only option, the only alternative we see as viable, feasible as a historical project of life, is precisely the path towards socialism.

We believe, therefore – drawing on the experiences and our assessments of the four previous internationals, which had Europe as their epicentre precisely because of the industrial revolution and the great contradictions expressed in the context of rapidly growing capitalism, and which led to its highest stage, imperialism – that all these contradictions have been transferred to Latin America, and have created in Venezuela the conditions, the features, to make a call of this nature.

I repeat, it must become an organization that is permanent in nature, that is able to summon all the parties of the Left, social movements, prominent individuals and historical currents of thought. And not just specifically those raising the historical project of socialism; anti-imperialism should be the common element that brings us all together.

Of course we don't just want one more event, one more conference. We're making this call not just in order to open a discussion, a debate, to produce a document, but to actually set minimum agreements, to adopt a minimum transitional program, a policy of developing in all the five continents, based on the analysis of the current situation, a characterization of each particular region. We want to consider expeditiously the transition towards a model that overcomes the contradictions of capital and labour.

Why is anti-imperialism being proposed as the common element and not just socialism?

We say that this call has to have a broad character. It is possible that in some countries, such as in the Middle East, there are organizations and movements fighting against some expressions of imperialism and international Zionism as such but that are not socialist in essence, in the programmatic sense. But, undoubtedly, they are fighting imperialism.

That's why we say that it could be that in some Islamic countries that do not have socialism as an ideological element – for example the case of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which is anti-imperialist – that this element will be an element that will summon as many parties, organizations, movements in the world to join the battle, the confrontation with imperialism.

As well as all those who defend a model based on the world view of indigenous people, and the principles and approaches of scientific socialism, elements of regional and Bolivarian thought, the ideas of Mariátegui, of Martí, the tree of the three roots in Venezuela, [see note – editor] and

all those who are part of a historical, philosophical current that defends the claims accumulated through many years of struggle by the peoples in this part of the world.

From this anti-imperialist perspective, this vision informed by the experience of the historical struggles of indigenous peoples, it is possible to summon as many parties, movements, and currents in the world, let us repeat, for a wide-ranging debate, a full discussion, and to agree on a plan, a minimum transitional program, to move concretely towards a socialist project at a world level.

An anti-imperialist project is the only way at this juncture, faced with the cyclical crisis of capitalism. Capitalism is not going to collapse by itself, but is in a process of readjustment, of realignment, of looking for the possibility of a second wind. We believe that at this juncture it is possible to consider an alternative, but it must be global and anti-imperialist.

There is a core document that we have been discussing within the congress, in the international committee of the PSUV congress. A document in which we have assessed and taken stock of what the four previous socialist internationals signified, the context in which they were called, of the proposals, the achievements that they made. And in view of the historical relevance, the policy of aggression against the Bolivarian revolution, and the processes of transformation that have been occurring in other countries, we believe it is possible to produce a document that contains all those elements.

We have even talked about the definition of the historical subject – those who are making the call, and the social movements, currents and parties in different continents and different countries who are engaged in a common struggle with us, which is the struggle against imperialism.

Therefore, we believe that through this approach and, of course, discussing the objectives of this call for a Fifth International – or as we also call it, the First Socialist International of the 21st Century, because there are some discussions with the Communist Party comrades who do not recognize the Fourth International, but we say it is not a question of numbers, but in any case it would be the first Socialist International of this century. And under these assumptions, by seeking to broaden the programmatic base, the doctrinal principles, with an agenda of topics to discuss, a program to develop, it will be possible to go beyond simply producing a document, and to produce an agreement that is expressed in very concrete policies, recognizing the reality of each continent, of each country, and this effort should lead to the articulation of a powerful global movement to allow us to move forward.

We can move forward on a debate, a discussion about what things we can agree on, opening the possibility that within the meeting there will also be a debate on the whole mechanism of coordination, of integration, beyond governments, because this is not a government event, we are talking about parties, movements, to develop an international policy which has internationalism as a spearhead of counter-hegemonic confrontation.

I think it is possible to discuss all these aspects in Venezuela, and we can then come out of it with a minimum program, a minimum plan of work, again, respecting differences, allowing us to develop a policy around different continents that would have a permanent basis, so that we have

the possibility of regular meetings at a continental or regional level, to evaluate the progress of things, but it should also be binding for all organizations, movements and parties that make this call.

Here you have touched on a subject that historically has always been complicated, that is, the difference between diplomatic relations of governments and the relations of parties, particularly when some of these parties are also in government, like the PSUV, which was created following the call made by a head of state. This issue has been raised, for example, in relation to other governments with which Venezuela maintains good diplomatic relations but that are far from being socialist, where one understands that the State should have diplomatic relations, but where left-wing forces who may be interested in participating [in the Fifth International] are part of the opposition to these governments.

I think that right now we are having a very interesting debate in the ideological congress of the party. Remember that, three years ago, we had a founding congress and this is the first ideological congress. Coincidentally, we are right now finishing the discussion and debate about the programmatic basis for a party which is conceived for the transition to socialism. We are discussing the values, principles, statutes, and clearly we have been discussing and distinguishing that one thing is the government's foreign policy and another thing is the international politics of the PSUV.

I think we're making a clear conceptualization of these two positions where, undoubtedly, there are levels of convergence because we believe that the PSUV should be a space, a scenario where policy is discussed in order to be executed precisely at the level of government, in this case in ministries to which international issues apply, of course with the participation, the approval of President Chávez, who is leading the State's foreign policy and is at the same time the party president.

There are things the government and our embassies cannot say, but the PSUV is more likely to express positions from an ideological point of view and this has been a large part of the discussion that has occurred in the national congress.

So I think we're making good progress in differentiating the foreign policy of the government and the party, understanding the peculiarity that in this case the president is the president of the nation and, at the same time, the party president.

We have been careful not to get involved in discussions within other countries, to not take positions on issues which are up to the peoples of those countries and their governments to take.

But in any case, the PSUV is proposing to design, to elaborate a policy, an offensive that allows us to establish contacts at the global level with those organizations and social movements that have been doing solidarity work with Venezuela, which have been supportive of the efforts and initiatives taken by the Bolivarian revolution, with the achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution, and this is giving us a chance to come together and network with many movements, with many parties and organizations in the world that share the historical project of socialism, the historical project to overcome the contradiction between capital and labour.

We believe we have made great strides in this need to differentiate what is the government's foreign policy and what is the party's international politics. Internationalism is enshrined in the statutes in the values and principles, because this is not a party that is thinking only about the transition that is happening in Venezuela.

We are talking about a party that has to assume internationalism, solidarity and to develop the necessary initiatives in terms of confronting imperialism and strengthening policy coordination with those parties, movements and organizations that defend anti-imperialist struggle.

I think we have made significant progress there. We do not believe that at this moment, just as we are finishing the first ideological congress of the party, that we have the party that we want, but undoubtedly, we have advanced, we have taken very strong steps towards building this powerful instrument within which we can discuss and debate the major issues, major policies, major decisions to advance the transition to socialism.

Has the document drafted by the commission been approved already or is it still under discussion?

The international commission was charged with the responsibility of drawing up a document. The document is circulating internally within the party; it is in the hands of the national leadership and, of course, has been raised for the consideration of the president of the party.

The document is circulating and there have been some comments, and when the president authorizes it, that is the basic document that will be released to encourage and motivate the discussion on the historical relevance and the need to summon all the parties and movements across the world that struggle against imperialism and for the construction of a socialist project.

Obviously, in a revolutionary situation, things cannot simply be determined by a calendar, particularly in the context of the offensive that imperialism has launched in recent months, but is there an idea, at least, of when the founding of the Fifth International will be?

Indeed there is a whole plan of different phases that has been submitted for consideration, where it has been proposed to call meetings at a regional or continental level, to create promotional teams, with a strategy for disseminating information so that it can be built from the bottom up.

It is anticipated that all these elements, the creation of an information system, making all the communicational elements that the revolution has been using, all these tools, all these resources, available to the revolution and parties worldwide, will be part of this plan by phases.

There is also the idea of holding various meetings, where there is even the possibility that our delegations will travel to other continents, other countries to discuss, to motivate, to create the conditions for starting to debate the issue.

Editor's note: "The tree of the three roots in Venezuela" is an expression peculiar to Chavismo. This appears to be a reference to Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez and Ezequiel Zamora, respectively the founding independence leader of Venezuela, a 19th century educator, and the liberal leader of the Federalists in the Federal War of 1859-1863.

LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion.

Socialist Voice #433, May 2, 2010

New Pamphlets: Climate; Venezuela; Cochabamba; Population

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SOCIALIST VOICE PAMPHLETS

IF THE CLIMATE WERE A BANK, IT WOULD ALREADY HAVE BEEN SAVED Latin America versus Imperialism at the Copenhagen Summit

by Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales,
Pablo Solon, Angelica Navarro

Articles include:

- Hugo Chavez: The battle of Copenhagen
- Fidel Castro: Who really was to blame for the failure in Copenhagen?
- Evo Morales: We cannot end global warming without ending capitalism
- Pablo Solón: The main issue for us is Mother Earth
- Angelica Navarro The developed countries must pay their debt
- ... and more

CONFIDENCE IN THE PEOPLE, CONFIDENCE IN THE GRASSROOTS

Venezuela Fights for Socialism in the 21st Century

by Federico Fuentes and Kiraz Janicke

Federico Fuentes and Kiraz Janicke are Caracas-based socialists who write frequently for Venezuelanalysis, Green Left Weekly, and Socialist Voice.

- New Moves to Build Workers' Power.
- ALBA Vows to Fight Climate Change with System Change
- The Revolution Faces Crucial Battles
- Chavez's Historic Call for International Socialist Unity

CLIMATE AND CAPITALISM PAMPHLETS

DEBATING POPULATION: Articles and Arguments on Population, Immigration and Climate Change

Some of the most intense debates on the Climate and Capitalism website have concerned population. The unique pamphlet contains three recent articles

- *Should Climate Activists Support Limits on Immigration?* by Ian Angus and Simon Butler
- *I=PAT Means Nothing, Proves Nothing* by Ben Courtice
- *Do Individual Consumers Cause Climate Change?* by Ian Angus
- **Plus:** responses, criticisms and replies from a wide range of C&C readers, debating this critical subject

COCHABAMBA: Documents of the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, Bolivia, April 2010

The Cochabamba conference was a breakthrough for the global climate justice movement. This pamphlet contains three key resolutions from this important meeting.

- *The People's Agreement on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*
- *Indigenous People's Declaration: 'Mother Earth can live without us, but we can't live without her'*
- *The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*

Climate and Capitalism encourages the widest possible distribution of these resolutions. This pamphlet may be reproduced and distributed or sold by climate and social justice groups and activists, so long as no changes are made, and so long as the selling price does not exceed a reasonable cost of production.

Socialist Voice #434, May 24, 2010

Haitians need shelter and aid, now! End neglect and foreign interference!

This statement was issued May 18 by Haiti Solidarity BC, the Vancouver affiliate of the Canada Haiti Action Network, on the occasion of the May 20 visit to Vancouver of former U.S. President William Clinton.

Vancouver's business community will gather on May 20 to hear a high-priced speech from former U.S. President William Clinton. The host Vancouver Board of Trade describes Clinton as a "powerful voice for progress." It fails to mention that President Clinton is both the UN Special Envoy on Haiti and the co-chair of the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission. The former president's record on Haiti exemplifies the past and current failures of foreign aid that at turns neglects and harms the Haitian people.

More than four months after the January 12 earthquake, hundreds of thousands of Haitians are without shelter, food and medical care. As the seasonal rains fall, grave threats of infectious disease epidemic hover over the earthquake zone. Despite the hundreds of millions of dollars at their disposal, aid from foreign charities and NGOs has not reached many, perhaps a majority, of earthquake victims. A recent study by CBS News of five top U.S. charities raising funds for Haiti reveals they have spent only a fraction of funds raised. The Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund and the Clinton Foundation are among the most delinquent; they have raised \$52 million and spent only \$7 million.

As the calamity in Haiti continues, growing numbers of observers are noting the same patterns of neglect of the basic needs and rights of Haitians, coupled with foreign interference in Haiti's politics and economy, that marked the pre-earthquake period. One glaring example is the fact that the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission, responsible for allocating much of the \$14 billion dollars promised by the world for Haiti relief, is in its majority run by non-Haitian appointees.

By his own admission in March of this year, President Clinton's past record in Haiti is one of failure. In 1994, his U.S. administration sponsored the restoration to power of Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide, who had been overthrown in a 1991 military coup. It set conditions on Aristide's restoration the presidency, including agricultural import policies that destroyed a large part of Haiti's food-producing capacity and ruinous privatization of the precious few public enterprises in the country.

The current prescriptions for Haiti by the former president and the Interim Commission he heads follow similar failed themes, including promoting sweatshop factory investment as a panacea for the country's economic ills. Additionally, since the second overthrow of President Aristide, on February 29, 2004, the U.S., Canada and other foreign powers have consistently failed to follow through on promises of aid spending in Haiti.

Half of the \$220 million in aid promised by the Canadian government to “match” donations made by Canadians to charities in the calamitous aftermath of the earthquake will not go to Haitians at all, but instead to international financial institutions to retire Haiti’s foreign debt. Another \$65 million is promised to the Red Cross and other international agencies. The federal government and Canadian International Development Agency have allocated an additional \$44 million for prison construction and equipping the Haitian National Police, a notorious human rights violating agency.

Meanwhile, the Haitian government has received next to nothing of the funds raised internationally in Haiti’s name.

For several months now, Canada’s print and broadcast media have all but fallen silent on the perilous situation still facing most earthquake victims and what, if anything, Canadian aid money is accomplishing. When Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lawrence Cannon, visited Haiti for three days in early May, not a single English-language news outlet in Canada reported on his visit. The same media has steadfastly avoided any serious examination of Canada’s participation in the 2004 overthrow of President Aristide.

Haiti Solidarity BC reiterates here the principles of Haiti reconstruction that its affiliated organization, the Canada Haiti Action Network, voiced in a February 28 statement:

- Relief and reconstruction must respect and promote the sovereignty of Haiti’s government and social and political institutions.
- A national emergency program of economic development must be supported. It should prioritize revival of the agricultural economy and food self-sufficiency as well as promotion of public, industrial and service enterprises, manufacturing investment that pays living wages, tourism, fishing, and arts and culture.
- Inclusive democracy must be promoted and respected. The 2009 decisions of Haiti’s interim electoral council to exclude the Fanmi Lavalas party from participation in elections must be repudiated, and steps must be taken to facilitate the return of the exiled President Jean Bertrand Aristide.
- Foreign control of Haiti must end. Restitution and compensation for the illegal and destructive coup d’etat of 2004 must be provided. All remaining political prisoners dating from the coup d’etat of 2004 must be released from prison or freed from judicial persecution. Foreign militaries and police must undertake a quick and orderly withdrawal, subject to Haitian government directives.
- Haiti’s outstanding debt to international financial agencies must be cancelled.

Haiti Solidarity BC calls on the Canadian government to spend relief funds on social and economic assistance for Haiti, not on prisons and police. We call on Canada’s media and federal political parties to properly inform Canadians of what our government and the aid agencies it funds are, or are not, doing in our name.

Read this statement at: www.canadahaitiaction.ca

Socialist Voice #432, May 24, 2010

Do Indigenous Concepts Help or Hinder in Fighting the World's Climate Crisis?

A LeftViews Debate between Pablo Stefanoni and Hugo Blanco

Translated and introduced by Richard Fidler

The World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia in April, has fueled a growing debate in Latin America over the validity and usefulness of traditional Indigenous value systems and forms of organization in resolving the pressing social problems of the region, not least the challenges posed by the climate crisis. We publish here two differing assessments.

- **Pablo Stefanoni** is the editor of the Bolivian edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.
- **Hugo Blanco** is a longstanding indigenous leader of the peasant movement in Peru and editor of the newspaper *La Lucha Indígena*.

The Cochabamba conference was called by Bolivian President Evo Morales in the wake of the disastrous United Nations climate change conference in Copenhagen last December. It was attended by more than 30,000 activists from over 100 countries. They adopted a People's Agreement that assigns responsibility for the climate crisis to the capitalist system and rejects the use of market mechanisms in combating climate change.

Conference participants were critical of the dependency of most semicolonial "Third World" countries on resource-based export strategies that devastate local environments while frustrating attempts at endogenous development in the interests of local and national communities. However, they identified the main culprit as the uneven development intrinsic to imperialism, a system "that has led the richest countries to have an ecological footprint five times bigger than what the planet is able to support." And they concluded:

"It is imperative that we forge a new system that restores harmony with nature and among human beings. And in order for there to be balance with nature, there must first be equity among human beings. We propose to the peoples of the world the recovery, revalorization, and strengthening of the knowledge, wisdom, and ancestral practices of Indigenous Peoples, which are affirmed in the thought and practices of 'Living Well,' recognizing Mother Earth as a living being with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship."

Mother Earth, in the Indigenous languages of Latin America, is known as Pachamama. Prominent among the conference participants were Indigenous peoples, and their thinking and influence were clear in its decisions.

Evo Morales followed up the Cochabamba Conference by presenting its proposals in a major speech at the United Nations before the G77 + China, a group of the world's poorest countries (plus China) that (as he put it) "are the least responsible for climate change and, nonetheless, the

most affected by the dire impacts of global warming.” The other South American heads of state, gathered at the UNASUR conference in Buenos Aires on May 4, endorsed the Cochabamba People’s Agreement, urged other member governments to join the effort “to open spaces on the subject of climate change,” and agreed to discuss further such actions at their scheduled meeting in Cancún, Mexico later this year.

The Bolivian government, along with its partners in UNASUR and the anti-imperialist Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), has sought to use tribunals like Cochabamba’s as a means to enhance consciousness and build international support that can help provide these oppressed and exploited countries with greater latitude to resist imperialism and develop their own people-oriented alternative development strategies. The Cochabamba Conference marked an important step forward in this process.

However, that is not the view of Pablo Stefanoni, whose newspaper is the Bolivian edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the Paris monthly magazine that is influential in the broad left, including in the milieu that organizes the World Social Forums. Stefanoni saw the Cochabamba Conference as a diversion from the pressing tasks facing Bolivia. In his opinion, its dominant Indigenous discourse, which he scornfully dismisses as pachamamismo, is an obstacle to efforts to free Bolivia from dependency on resource exports and “prevents Bolivia from being a serious player in the big international leagues.”

Hugo Blanco, responding to Stefanoni, offers a very different, positive assessment of the contribution of Indigenous thinking to the world struggle against the climate crisis.

Related reading: Ian Angus, “Cochabamba: Climate Justice Has a New Program and New Hope for Victory,” *Socialist Voice*, April 29, 2010

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WHERE IS PACHAMAMISMO TAKING US?

by Pablo Stefanoni

Rebelión, April 28, 2010

The Tiquipaya summit[1] — over and above the chickens, gays and bald men that were given such extensive media coverage, over what could be interpreted as a presidential slip[2] — revealed something of relevance to the future: The process of change is too important to be left in the hands of the *pachamámicos*. The affectation of ancestral authenticity may be useful for seducing revolutionary tourists in search of Latin America’s “familiar exoticism” and even more so Bolivia’s (according to Marc Saint-Upéry[3]) but it does not seem capable of contributing anything significant in terms of building a new State, instituting a new model of development, discussing a viable productive model or new forms of democracy and mass participation.

What is more, *pachamamismo* — a sort of stylish newspeak — serves to dissolve Bolivians’ profound yearnings for change in the deaf ear of a supposed alternative to Western philosophy, even though it is learned in such global spaces as NGO workshops, in the calm of Duke University or in the courses supervised by Catherine Walsh in the Universidad Andina[4] or the FLACSO Ecuador. In the last analysis, as becomes more obvious each time, we are presented

with a global new-age Indigenous discourse with scant capacity to reflect the actually existing ethnicities. And, as in the countries of actually existing socialism, this “newspeak” can infinitely expand the hiatus between discourse and reality (why do they say nothing about extractivism and the *reprimarización* of the economy,[5] for example?), weakening the transformative energies of the society.

So, instead of discussing how to combine developmental expectations with an intelligent eco-environmentalism, the *pachamámico* discourse offers us a cataract of words in Aymara, pronounced with an enigmatic tone, and a naïve reading of the crisis of capitalism and western civilization. Or directly, in interpretative broadsides like that of Fernando Huanacuni, a foreign office official, who told an Argentine newspaper that the earthquake in Haiti was a small warning of the economic-global-cosmic-telluric-educational impetuosity of the Pacha Mama.

Do the politics of Edgar Patana [the elected mayor of El Alto and disputed labour leader] reflect a new spirituality? Does Isaac Ávalos [the senator and peasant leader] intervene in the Senate asking leave of Grandmother Cosmos? Or does Gustavo Torrico [the deputy interior minister] base his management of the police on the criterion that the rights of Pacha Mama (and ants) are more important than human rights?

In Europe there is much greater awareness of the recycling of garbage (including plastic products) than there is in our country, where in many ways everything remains to be done, and an informed and technically solid environmentalism seems much more effective than managing climate change on the basis of a supposed First Nations’ philosophy, often an excuse of some urban intellectuals for not addressing the urgent problems facing the country. Many of the official mistakes in the summit are not unrelated to its having handed over the theme of climate change to the *pachamámicos*, whose irresponsibility prevents Bolivia from being a serious player in the big international leagues. For many intellectuals, the Bolivian laboratory may provide enormous material for their own investigations, and many NGOs are delighted to fund all kinds of social experiments. But for Bolivians the cost of a new lost opportunity could not be covered by all the cooperation projects combined.

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INDIANISMO AND PACHAMAMISMO

by Pablo Stefanoni

Rebelión, May 05, 2010

My previous column in this newspaper provoked an irate reply from some comrades who (without saying so) consider themselves part of the *pachamámica* current, which — without any evidence — they seek to transform into a synonym for Indigenous and the sole ideological basis of the current process of change. In reality, *indianismo* did not exist in the Chapare, and in the Altiplano, Felipe Quispe talked less of Pacha Mama and Pacha Tata[6] than he did of tractors, the Internet, and rural development projects for the commune residents, in the framework of an Aymara nationalist project. Kataristas and Indianistas engage in politics; the *pachamámicos* the cult of the esoteric. I have never seen a blockade for *vivir bien* [to live well], although I could be mistaken.

Nor was *pachamamismo* the discursive basis of the Indigenous rebellions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, as Forrest Hylton shows in relation to Chayanta (1927),[7] where the representative chiefs were demanding education and recognition of their authorities and lands in alliance with sectors of the urban left, their pleas laden with modern/western anti-slavery discourse. And in the Forties and Fifties the unions in many regions broke with the conservative role of the traditional authorities in the preservation of a neocolonial status quo.

Many of their categories, such as the *chacha-warmi* to mention only one,[8] do not stand up to historical investigation, and according to Milton Eyzaguirre have more to do with the imposition of the Catholic vision of marriage than they do with ancestral customs. Does decolonization mean returning to the two republics of the Viceroy Toledo?[9] In the last analysis, there are non-Indigenous pachamámicos and non-pachamámicos Indigenous — possibly the majority — so there is no basis for labelling just any criticism as racist. While it seems profoundly radical, its “philosophical” generality provides no clue to overcoming dependent capitalism, extractivism and *rentismo*,[10] nor to the construction of a new State or the need for “post-clientelist” forms of politics. While it has little impact in the Government, *pachamamismo* is a useful discourse for turning any serious debate into hollow “philosophical” rhetoric.

The debate over decolonization cannot overlook the tension between the survival of the ghetto (in the form of preservation of “ancestral” identity and culture or theories of the “good farmer” Indian or, directly, the good Avatar-like ecological savage) and assimilation: access to “universal” culture. Possibly, intermediate between both extremes, there might arise a successful road to decolonization and social and cultural mobility. (In some haciendas the landlords, not exactly supporters of pluriculturalism or multiculturalism, would only allow entrance to priests who would speak Aymara with their Indian tenants; otherwise the latter would learn Castellano and leave.)

Pachamamismo inhibits any serious discussion, for example, of what it is to be Indigenous in the 21st century. How can the Aymara owner of a fleet of minibuses in El Alto and convert to Pentacostalism be compared simply with the resident of a commune in the north of Potosí who continues to produce in the context of an ethnic economy? How is it possible to apply the communitarian model in a country that is majority urban and criss-crossed by all types of hybridization/migration/insertion in global markets, and the rise of an Indigenous/mestizo commercial bourgeoisie? And finally, who elected the globalized *pachamámico* intellectuals to speak on behalf of the Indigenous of Bolivia and the world? Yes, these are the words of a “mono-thinker”, but they may be worth a response.

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REPLY TO PABLO STEFANONI'S 'INDIANISMO AND PACHAMAMISMO'

by Hugo Blanco

Lucha Indígena, May 11, 2010

Pablo Stefanoni begins his article “Where is *pachamamismo* taking us?” by taking his distance from the stupid assessment that the right wing made of the Cochabamba Summit. It seemed that

he would analyse the meeting, but apparently anti-Indigenous racism has blinded him and there is no serious assessment.

Let us see what Silvia Ribeiro, a researcher, journalist and coordinator of environmental campaigns in Uruguay, Brazil and Sweden, has to say about this meeting. She is an international lecturer on those subjects and has followed the negotiation of various United Nations environmental treaties:

“The response to the official call for this summit exceeded all expectations, both in numbers attending (35,000) and in content, making it an historic landmark in the international debate on the climate crisis. Faced with the maneuvers of the powerful governments in Copenhagen, Bolivia appealed to the grassroots of the world’s societies to demonstrate their positions and present them to the governments. In both respects it was an overwhelming success. And it strengthened the networks and interactions among the movements....

“A common basis was created for developing understanding, critical analysis and strategies in relation to the climate crisis, enriched by various perspectives from many cultures, peoples, and interest groups on the continent and around the world. The Cochabamba People’s Agreement reflects this.”

A serious analysis would have begun by specifically evaluating the conclusions of the meeting, the *People’s Agreement* mentioned by Ribeiro. Stefanoni does not do that; the only comment he makes of the meeting in another article of his is that “the summit would be of little advantage if it served only to confirm the (deserved) international popularity of our President and to engage in emotional anticapitalism in a tumultuous collective catharsis.”[11]

Stefanoni says “Many of the official mistakes in the summit are not unrelated to its having handed over the theme of climate change to the *pachamámicos*....”

Who handed it over? Morales, following his correct intervention in Copenhagen, which precisely corresponded to the sentiment of the 100,000 persons who were protesting the inaction of the governments, was the only president who called the summit, not only for the Indigenous but for the people of the world.

No one has handed over the subject of climate change to the Indigenous. They are the ones who day after day are fighting and dying, as they have in Bagua, Peru, in defence of Mother Earth and against the environmental pollution resulting from the action of the big multinational corporations. Currently, the Indigenous peoples of Ecuador have shifted towards opposing Correa’s “Socialism of the 21st Century” because of his resource extraction policy. But these ecological battles are of no importance for Stefanoni; they do not amount to civilized ecology. “In Europe there is much greater awareness of the recycling of garbage (including plastic products) than there is in our country, where in many ways everything remains to be done, and an informed and technically solid environmentalism seems much more effective than managing climate change on the basis of a supposed First Nations’ philosophy....”

We agree with the criticisms by the *compañeros* of Mesa 18 [Working Group 18][12] of the continued resource extraction practices of the Bolivian government. They criticized the government specifically for not being, as Stefanoni puts it, consistently “*pachamamista*”.

Stefanoni says, among other things, “I have never seen a blockade for ‘*vivir bien*’, although I could be mistaken.” In Peru, the environmental battles I mentioned are waged on behalf of “*buen vivir*” in opposition to capitalism’s teaching that we should “earn more money in the least possible time.” As a woman in those battles recently stated, “I am not going to eat gold.”

“The *pachamámico* discourse, on this and other points, simply takes the debates onto the terrain of philosophy, a discipline worthy of the greatest respect, except when used as an excuse not to address the burning issues that we must confront.”[13]

We agree that it should not be used as an excuse, but we are entitled to use it to defend Mother Earth, which is not what Stefanoni does when he demands that we abandon our Indigenous way of viewing the world — which, of course, is not his. We are entitled to maintain and develop our identity just as he has the right to maintain his vision of the world.

“The debate over decolonization cannot overlook the tension between the survival of the ghetto (in the form of preservation of ‘ancestral’ identity and culture or theories of the ‘good farmer’ Indian....”

First, let’s talk about the ghetto. The great majority of Indigenous are not and do not want to be a ghetto. (Of course there are exceptions who do have that reverse racist spirit, such as Felipe Quispe, who is respectfully mentioned by Stefanoni.) The Pachacuti party in Ecuador accepts *gringos* as members, provided they agree with its program. In Peru, we consider ourselves part of the broader mass movement. Morales invited everyone to come to the Cochabamba meeting (unfortunately, many of the Europeans who were in Copenhagen could not attend because their flights were cancelled due to ashes from the volcano in Iceland).

The best example are the Mayas of Chiapas [in Mexico], who have said “We are Indigenous, we are proud of it, we want to be respected as Indigenous. We consider ourselves brothers of all the poor people in Mexico and the world.” Bear in mind that the first international meeting to debate the theme “Against neoliberalism, for humanity,” much before the World Social Forums, was held in the mud of Chiapas in response to the call of the Zapatista Indigenous, and it was attended by representatives from 70 countries.

As to “the good farmer Indian,” of course this is true, we have an age-old heritage of farming that safeguards the soil. Indigenous agriculture does not engage in monoculture, which destroys the soil, nor does it use agrochemicals that likewise destroy the soil as does modern agro-industry which also uses genetically modified organisms and has discovered the wonders of the terminator seed, which cannot be used for reproduction. Indigenous agriculture, among other things, mixes crops and practices crop rotation, which conserves the soil.

“The process of change is too important to be left in the hands of the *pachamámicos*.”

Who wants to do that? The Indigenous movement, which is fighting for change, appeals to all the people to join in that struggle.

“The affectation of ancestral authenticity may be useful for seducing revolutionary tourists in search of Latin America’s ‘familiar exoticism’ ... but it does not seem capable of contributing anything significant in terms of building a new State, instituting a new model of development, discussing a viable productive model or new forms of democracy and mass participation.... its ‘philosophical’ generality provides no clue to overcoming dependent capitalism, extractivism and rentismo, nor to the construction of a new State....”

The Indigenous community exists in any country in America with an Indigenous population: Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, Mexico, the United States, Canada. This community holds that it is the collectivity that is in charge (which does not mean there are no communities deformed by the capitalist environment surrounding them). It is, on a small scale, an organism of political power, struggling and coexisting alongside the power of the system.

Struggles against the system strengthen the community as an organism of power. I experienced this personally in the valley of La Convención, in Cusco, Peru, during the struggle for the land. We experienced it last year after the massacre in Bagua, when the police were afraid to enter many forest communities being ruled by the communal government.

We are seeing this strengthening now in Ecuador, as a result of the tension that exists between the Indigenous and “socialism of the 21st century.” In Cauca, Colombia, notwithstanding attacks by the government, the paramilitaries and the FARC,[14] the Indigenous organization is taken to higher levels of the community, and the communities are organized and are joining together.

The best example are the Indigenous of Chiapas, where the Indigenous have been governing themselves for more than 16 years in a collective, truly democratic form through “Juntas de Buen Gobierno” [Councils of Good Government], the members of which serve in rotation and are unpaid. The Zapatista National Liberation Army, which is also Indigenous in composition, does not participate in the government; its members are prohibited from being members of the councils. Its role is to protect the Indigenous communities from the attacks of the “bad government”.

The Indigenous do not “take” power, they build it from below in an authentically democratic form. They do not call it “socialism” because the “socialist” government in Chile has been jailing the Mapuche using Pinochet’s laws, and in Ecuador, as we said, they are struggling against “Socialism of the 21st century.”

Sooner or later, in Bolivia they will be confronting the government of the “Movement toward Socialism”, which is still not the Indigenous democratic government but an anti-imperialist government midway between the oligarchy and the Indigenous and Bolivian population in general, similar to the governments of Ecuador and Venezuela.

We hope that the non-Indigenous population will also participate in building the new society. We are excited by the existence of the “fábricas recuperadas” [occupied and worker-run factories] in Argentina. Probably there are other examples.

The use of the *pachamámico* language by government agencies and NGOs, which use it to hold back the movement and for other purposes, does not invalidate the Indigenous spirit, the Indigenous cosmovision, the Indigenous language, the Indigenous struggle. “Marxism-Leninism” was also used in the Soviet Union to massacre the workers’ vanguard, which does not invalidate Marxism or Leninism. The so-called democratic neoliberal governments do not invalidate democracy.

Translator’s notes

[1] The World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth was held April 20-22 in Tiqipaya, a town in Cochabamba Department, Bolivia.

[2] A comment by Evo Morales when addressing the summit was widely misinterpreted internationally. See <http://www.misna.org/news.asp?a=1&IDLingua=1&id=270943>.

[3] See <http://lists.econ.utah.edu/pipermail/marxism/2009-February/044800.html>.

[4] Catherine E. Walsh is director of the Doctoral Program in Latin American Cultural Studies, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, Ecuador. See <http://tinyurl.com/2dpgby4>. FLACSO Ecuador is the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, Ecuador section.

[5] *Reprimarización*, a Spanish neologism sometimes translated as “re-primarization,” means forcing the economy to produce those low value-added items where it has an absolute competitive advantage — in Bolivia, for example, hydrocarbons extraction for export with little development of refining capacity or endogenous manufacturing.

[6] Respectively, Quechua for Mother Earth and Earth Father. Felipe Quispe heads the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) and has also been general secretary of the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felipe_Quispe. The Chapare district of Bolivia is the heartland of the Indigenous coca growers, whose union is headed even now by Evo Morales.

[7] See Forrest Hylton, “The Bolivian Blockades in Historical Context”, <http://www.counterpunch.org/hylton02012003.html>.

[8] *Chacha Warmi*: the Quechua principle of two sexes, working together to attain equilibrium in the cosmos. Evo Morales describes his cabinet, which is composed equally of men and women, as an example. Three of the 10 female members are Indigenous social activists.

[9] The Viceroyalty of Peru was one of the two Spanish Viceroyalties in America from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Viceroy Francisco de Toledo laid the basis for Spanish rule in Peru from 1569 to 1582. He executed Túpac Amaru, the last Indigenous leader of the Inca state in Peru.

[10] *Rentismo* refers to economic dependency on royalties and taxes from natural resource extraction.

[11] See “Bolivia Avatar,” <http://www.surysur.net/?q=node/13391>.

[12] Mesa 18 was an informal working group at the Cochabamba summit, in addition to the 17 official working groups, comprised of people from social movements opposed to mining and hydrocarbon policies of the Morales government.

[13] “Bolivia Avatar”, op. cit.

[14] Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the oldest and largest insurgent grouping in that country. FARC guerrillas have been known to attack Indigenous communities.

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Bolivia: When fantasy trumps reality

by **Federico Fuentes**

Under the presidency of Evo Morales, Bolivia has achieved a new constitution incorporating the rights of indigenous peoples, the beginning of land reform, the nationalization of important natural resources and increased state social spending to the poor. We hear nothing of this in the mainstream media. And ironically, although the left is fiercely critical of biased media coverage, it can also fall in the trap of media distortion, particularly if its coverage dovetails with its own fantasies.

A May 14 article by Daniel Lopez published by Australian group Socialist Alternative is proof of this. The article echoes the view of a May 10 article on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corp.) website, which shows a clear dislike of Bolivian President Evo Morales. The BBC article argued a “general strike” by Bolivian unions marked “the end of the honeymoon period between the left-wing Mr. Morales and his power base among the country’s poor.”

This position fits nicely with the outlook of Socialist Alternative, which also condemns Bolivia’s first indigenous president. Lopez wrote that Morales’ moves “against the working class” have led to “the first large-scale action of workers in opposition to the Morales government.”

According to Lopez, “demonstrations were held around the country [on May 4], accompanied by a 24-hour general strike which was then extended indefinitely.” Despite the “sellout” of the Bolivian Workers’ Federation (COB) leadership, Lopez assured us “the strike is well into its second week.” A deal struck between Morales and the COB has been “resolutely rejected”, Lopez said, and “the strike continues.”

The ‘indefinite general strike’ that wasn’t

On May 1, as well as nationalizing four electricity companies, Morales restated his government would not increase workers’ salaries by more than 5%. This was met with protests in various cities. COB general secretary Pedro Montes announced a follow-up 24-hour strike for May 4.

Reporting on the May 4 “general strike,” *Bolpress* said, “hundreds of teachers, factory workers and health workers . . . alternated down the Prado in La Paz” in divided marches. *La Prensa* said “at least 500” factory workers descended on the labour ministry, where they attempted to burn down the front door, leading to 15 arrests.

Pedro Alberto Calderon, a leader of the La Paz factory workers, continued the dispute with the miners by calling for Montes’ expulsion from the COB “because he has betrayed the whole working class” by not marching in La Paz, *La Prensa* said. Montes instead chose to join a miners’ march in Oruro.

News sources also reported 500 health workers marched in Santa Cruz. In Cochabamba, factory workers blocked the local bus terminal. About 500 to 1,000 marched in Sucre, and smaller protests were held in the other capital cities.

“In the combative city of El Alto”, *Bolpress* said, “productive activity was normal”, as in most of Bolivia.

On May 7, a COB assembly called for an “indefinite general strike” to begin May 10, *La Razon* said.

In response, Bolivia’s largest peasant organization, the United Confederation of Bolivian Peasant Workers (CSUTCB), the national women’s peasant federation, the coca growers’ union from the Chapare, and the Departmental Workers Centre of Santa Cruz all defended the government and opposed against COB’s actions measures, because “they only hurt the brothers and sisters of the countryside and the country.” (*Bolpress*, May 10)

The CSUTCB is the largest COB affiliate, representing 1.5 million peasants. It is a key part of Morales’s Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party.

By May 11, everyone agreed the “indefinite general strike” was a flop. *La Razon*’s website that day read: “Support scarce for general strike.”

Union leaders representing teachers, health workers and factory workers did not strike, but were negotiating with the government, *La Razon* said. In an article headlined “The government’s offers weaken COB protests,” *Bolpress* said union divisions “weakened to the point of converting the general strike to almost nil.”

Instead, *La Prensa* said, 300 workers, mainly miners, gathered in Caracollo to begin a 200-kilometer walk to La Paz.

Tentative agreement

The night before, the COB and the government reached a tentative agreement to lower the retirement age from 65 to 58 (51 for miners). Bosses would also be forced to contribute to workers’ pension funds.

The COB, affiliated unions and government officials began to discuss the new proposals. Although the COB agreed to the new proposals, *Bolpress* said, some teachers, health workers and factory workers rejected it.

La Razon said after further discussions, the health workers’ union also agreed to the government proposals and called off future actions.

ABI reported on May 13 that Guido Midma, the executive secretary of the miners’ federation who was approvingly quoted in Lopez’s article, said: “The miners’ federation will not allow others to attack [the COB]. On the contrary, we call on these sectors to reflect, because they are automatically marginalizing themselves.”

A small contingent, mostly teachers, continued the march to La Paz. Factory workers and teachers pledged to once again “radicalize” their protests on May 18. They also continued to call for Montes’ removal and the sacking of several government ministers.

By May 17, *La Prensa* said, the La Paz factory workers' union had decided to postpone their actions. Union leader Wilson Mamani said the decision was taken at the request of other factory workers around the country.

On May 18, media reports said between 3,000 and 15,000 teachers arrived in La Paz, culminating the march from Caracollo. The National Confederation of Urban Teachers, however, was no longer supporting the march, although it continued to oppose the government's position.

Teachers' union leader Federico Pinaya told *La Razon* some sectors of the union were trying to use the protests in the lead-up to internal union elections. Rural teachers' unions pulled out of the protests and returned to the negotiating table.

By May 21, the only sector still protesting was a militantly anti-Morales section of the urban teachers union, who were demanding their wages be brought to the level of rural teachers. But even the leaders of the teachers' union have since come to an agreement with the government, subject to approval from the membership.

Bolivian reality

The small scale of the strikes and protests does not mean the government's proposed pay rise should not be debated or challenged.

There are tensions between the Morales government and its base. In the April 4 national elections, MAS faced more competition from dissident MAS sectors than right-wing forces. The Morales government has also had to face a range of small, but significant, conflicts with sectors traditionally aligned with MAS.

It is clear the movement for change in Bolivia needs to reflect on some of these warning signs.

However, confusing an "indefinite general strike" with a lot of huffing and puffing by a few union leaders, and symbolic protests, mixed with a good dose of internal union politicking, only leads us away from the real issues.

Today, the Bolivian workers' movement is far from the powerful force some Bolivian union leaders and foreign leftist like to fantasy it still is.

Bolivia's organized workers' movement is still suffering from the defeats inflicted by the implementation of neoliberal policies.

About 62% of the working class is in the informal sector, 83% in small companies with less than 10 workers, and the unionization rate is only 23%. This rate has steadily increased under the Morales government.

Nor is this the same Bolivia as in the past.

A 1970 COB thesis Lopez quoted approvingly does not mention the word "indigenous" once, even though the long-oppressed indigenous peoples make up about two-thirds of the population.

If this policy of refusing to acknowledge indigenous peoples' existence was mistaken then, it is criminal today.

Today, a revolutionary movement has developed, whose future is still to be determined – even if it didn't occur according to COB theses or manuals from afar.

With the COB in steady decline, it was indigenous and peasant sectors that led the resistance to the military dictatorship in 1978, and constructed the CSUTCB as its own independent organization in 1979. These sectors led the process of recapturing the historically marginalized indigenous peoples' self-identity and pride.

The resistance to neoliberalism over 1990-2005 did not emerge from the factories. It began in the countryside and spread to indigenous workers and the urban poor. The main indigenous and peasant organizations decided it was necessary to move from resistance to taking power. In the 1990s, they decided at a congress of Bolivia's most powerful unions to build their own political instrument to this end – creating what is now the MAS.

Indigenous struggles

As a result of this historic decision and the mass struggles that followed, they put one of their own in the presidency in 2005, electing Morales with a record high of 54% of the vote.

A new constitution incorporating the rights of indigenous peoples, the start of land reform, the nationalization of important natural resources and increased state social spending to the poor are some of the gains won since.

Lopez's article mentions none of this.

Morales also plays a leading role internationally in attacking the capitalist system for its responsibility for the climate crisis. Morales hosted a "people's summit" in Cochabamba in April that brought together 35,000 people from around the world to organize to fight back.

This does not mean the government cannot be criticized or that workers should not fight for their demands. But to paint the Morales government as the main enemy because of a dispute over wages, while failing to mention even once the suffering and resistance of the most marginalized who have benefited most from the Morales government, is blind sectarianism.

To raise the wage demands of sector of workers as the central issue in Bolivian politics, while ignoring the broader changes under way and the challenge any revolutionary government would face in lifting South America's poorest nation out of poverty and dependency, is pure and simple economism – that is, counter-posing demands about wages to the broader struggles of the oppressed.

Such positions are rejected by Bolivia's indigenous majority because they understand that, for the first time, they are charting their own path towards liberation.

Bolivia's revolutionary process needs a strong independent working class to help push it forward. But this goal is not advanced by denouncing as "sell-outs" anyone who tries to relate to Bolivian reality.

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