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Socialist Voice #231, February 6, 2008

Manley Report: Ottawa Gets Advice on Prolonging the Afghanistan War

By Roger Annis

Troubled by the failures of the U.S./NATO war in Afghanistan, the Canadian government commissioned a review last October of the war and Canada's participation. A panel of five corporate and political figures was cobbled together in an effort to reach broader consensus among the war's proponents.

Canada is an enthusiastic partner in the war, but there are growing concerns among the country's elite over the failure to defeat the patriotic resistance in Afghanistan, and a slim but stubborn majority of the Canadian population remains opposed to what increasingly appears to be a futile and criminal war.

The review panel's report, delivered January 22, has sparked an intense and ongoing political debate.

What the report says

The governing Conservative Party chose a prominent figure in the opposition Liberal Party, John Manley, to head the review panel. The Liberals took Canada into a more aggressive combat role in Afghanistan in May 2005, in the southern province of Kandahar, but some Liberals are getting cold feet and others are tempted to use the failure of the mission for short-term political gain at home.

The mandate of the mission is due for renewal in 2009. The Conservatives hold only a minority of seats in the federal parliament and would require Liberal support to get parliament to vote an extension.

The government gave the review panel four options for the future of Canada's role, all of which involved some variant of a continued intervention. Manley was already on the record in support of the war and a continued Canadian participation. Two other panel members—Derrick Burney and Paul Tellier—have served on the boards of directors of two of Canada's arms manufacturers, the aerospace companies CAE and Bombardier. So it was no surprise that the panel recommends that participation in the war continue.

Among the proposals contained in the report are:

- Continued commitment to the combat role in Kandahar until at least 2009.
- Insistence on more support from other NATO countries as a pre-condition for Canada to extend its combat mission beyond 2009. The report says at least 1,000 more troops are needed. With such increased support, Manley says the war can be won “in less than ten years.”
- Acquisition of helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles at an additional cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. Currently, Canada relies on NATO allies for air support to its ground troops.

Gloomy outlook

The report has been welcomed enthusiastically by the war’s proponents. An editorial in the January 23 *National Post* urged Harper to use the report as a basis to launch a “reinvigorated mission” in Afghanistan.

But many supporters are less than enthusiastic about the war’s accomplishments to date.

Paraphrasing the report, *National Post* columnist Don Martin says Canada’s “too-few-by-half combat troops” are, “ill-equipped, poorly coordinated and losing the battle to the enemy while failing to deliver adequate humanitarian aid or reconstruction help to average Afghans.” Martin, who has travelled extensively in Afghanistan, says the failure of the U.S./NATO war is a “sad reality.”

The most vocal critic among backers of the war has been the Senlis Council, a European-based think tank that conducts extensive surveying as well as charitable work in Afghanistan. In a series of detailed studies of the Canadian role in Afghanistan issued in 2006 and 2007, it flatly states that the war will be lost unless new approaches are made to win friends among ordinary Afghans.

“The fact stands that Canada is losing its war in Afghanistan,” writes Martin. “It’s high time other nations measured up as worthy allies against global terrorism—without being blackmailed by our bluff.”

Focus on NATO

The “other nations” referred to by Martin are Canada’s European allies in NATO. Their role in Afghanistan is a central focus of Manley’s recommendations, and a controversial one. The report says Canada should vigorously pressure and shame its allies in Europe into committing more troops to Afghanistan and engaging more actively in combat.

In a January 23 editorial entitled, “Demand the help of NATO partners,” the *Globe and Mail* writes, “What Mr. Manley proposes is a game of diplomatic chicken, but it is one that Mr. Harper cannot avoid.”

The editorial continues, “...it is a pitiful abdication of responsibility for larger countries such as France and Germany to refuse to assign another 1,000 (soldiers)...”

But what if the “allies” are not persuaded, or if they don’t take kindly to being blamed for the war’s failings? It’s a dilemma that Manley and the government are acutely aware of. They are careful to avoid describing their demands on NATO as blackmail or threats. The preferred term is “applying leverage.”

Canadian aid

Two issues particularly troubled the review panel—the failure of Canadian “aid” in Afghanistan, and the failure of the government to effectively “communicate” the good news of the war to the Canadian population. The report makes some frank criticism on these two fronts.

“Talk to CIDA (The Canadian International Development Agency) and you will hear all manner of good things about the work it is contributing to in Afghanistan,” wrote the *Globe and Mail* on January 24. But those seeking specifics on what Canada’s “aid” has accomplished “are left exasperated.”

The newspaper echoes what the Senlis Council has reported for several years, which is that Canada has nothing to show for the more than one billion dollars in “aid” money it has spent in Afghanistan since 2002. Ordinary Afghans remained mired in a terrible poverty, and they are frequent victims of indiscriminate bombings and military offensives by Canada and other NATO forces.

By all accounts, humanitarian conditions are deteriorating. Malalai Joya, the suspended member of the Afghan parliament, recently gave a grim picture of ordinary life in her country to the British newspaper *The Independent*. “The economic situation is also terrible – official figures put unemployment at around 60 percent but in reality it is much closer to 90 percent. Hundreds died in the winter from hypothermia, and women were so poor that they tried to sell their babies because they could not feed them.”

Senator Colin Kenny, chair of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, says getting explanations from CIDA is like grasping at air. He told CBC Radio’s *The Current* on January 22, “We haven’t been able to find out what they (CIDA) are doing,” despite extensive research by his committee. When members of his committee went to Afghanistan to examine aid projects firsthand, they were prevented from doing so by the Canadian military, who said it was “too dangerous” to venture outside the barbed wire military compound where they were housed.

Kenny said that when his committee met the government minister for CIDA, Beverley Oda, last year, they heard nothing but “gobbledegook.” They “didn’t get a straight answer from her in an hour and half.”

Manley’s report proposes that CIDA create a “signature project” such as a school or hospital that could be used to showcase Canadian “aid” to the Afghan people.

The report comes down hard on the government’s mishandling of the information and propaganda side of the war effort. As criticism of the war has mounted, including from its supporters, the government has reacted by closing down access to information. Panel member Derek Burney, a highly placed official of the governing Conservative Party, said, “I’m not

opposed to a more controlled message.” But he and the commission are concerned that a total clampdown on information does more harm than good.

Torture

By far the most serious political damage to the war effort has been done by non-stop revelations of the use of torture by Canada and NATO as a weapon of war. A damning editorial by the *Globe and Mail* on January 30 listed no less than seven occasions in 2006 and 2007 when the Conservative government lied about or misrepresented the Canadian military’s collusion with torture agencies of the Afghan government, police and armed forces.

The government’s latest subterfuge was an announcement on January 23 that as of November 2007, the Canadian military is no longer turning over prisoners to Afghan authorities because of the latter’s record of applying torture to its prisoners. The announcement baffled observers who wondered why it was not announced when it supposedly came into effect. The government answered by saying that it was not told of the change by the military. But this story had to change because military leaders reacted angrily to the implication that they are operating outside of the control and direction of the government.

The announcement begged a series of questions. If it was true, what is the military now doing with those it detains? Releasing them? Has it created its own detention facilities in Afghanistan? Is it turning prisoners over to the U.S.? The answer to these questions may lie in a February 4 report in *La Presse*. The Montreal daily reported that the Canadian military is secretly opening its own detention facility in a wing of the notorious central prison in Kabul.

Canada is already deeply implicated in the torture center operated in Guantánamo, Cuba, because of its refusal to seek the release of a Canadian citizen, Omar Khadr, an inmate since he was imprisoned there five years ago at the age of 15.

In December, army officials argued publicly that any relaxation of the detainment policy would gravely compromise the safety and security of the Canadian mission. Speaking to a committee of the Canadian Parliament on December 14, Brigadier-General André Deschamps, army chief of staff to Canada’s mission in Afghanistan, declared, “The insurgents could attack us with impunity knowing that if they fail to win an engagement they would simply have to surrender....”

But controversy over the torture policy will not go away. On February 1, the *Globe and Mail* reported that the governor of Kandahar province, Asadullah Khalid, has personally tortured prisoners; that the Canadian government knew of this since at least the spring of 2007; and that it has kept the information hidden. The following day, the newspaper reported that the head of Canada’s armed forces, Richard Hillier, praised Khalid as a good friend and ally of Canada and that it was up to the government of Afghanistan to investigate any allegations against him.

Government faces severe dilemma

The January 23 announcement of a supposed change in torture policy stems from the government’s growing concern about a legal challenge in Canada’s federal court brought by the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) and Amnesty International that would

oblige the military to treat prisoners according to the post-World War Two Geneva conventions. Like the U.S., Canada says its operations in Afghanistan are not bound by the conventions.

The government is trying to negotiate an end to legal challenge. The sticking point is the insistence by Amnesty and the BCCLA that any change to detention policy must be publicly announced seven days in advance.

The Manley report recommends strongly against any vote in the Canadian parliament on the future of the war. The Liberals say they want a withdrawal from the combat mission in Kandahar by 2009, but the review panel wants the Liberals and the governing Conservatives to reach an agreement to continue selling the war by “leveraging” more commitment from Canada’s imperialist allies in Europe.

Manley believes that the best outcome to hope for is a shattered Afghanistan where imperialist interests are nonetheless preserved. “We’re not going to have a VE day here with parades in the streets,” he cautioned journalists on January 23.

The furore over the Manley report can only increase the number of Canadians who question the war’s aims and rationale. Many more can be won to the view that the only principled and humanitarian end to the carnage is withdrawal of foreign occupation forces and recognition of the right of the Afghan people to freely determine their political future.

Roger Annis is a trade union activist in Vancouver BC and a member of that city’s Stopwar.ca coalition.

Socialist Voice #232, February 22, 2008

‘My only wish is to fight as a soldier in the battle of ideas’

By Fidel Castro

On Monday, February 18, Fidel Castro informed Cuba’s National Assembly that he will “neither aspire to nor accept” the positions of President of the State Council and Commander in Chief when elections are held this coming weekend.

Socialist Voice has always been a devoted partisan of the Cuban revolution. We join our voices to the millions worldwide who are saluting this great revolutionary leader.

Below, we reprint three articles:

- *Fidel’s Message to the People of Cuban (February 18)*
- *“Fidel’s Political Stature Praised Worldwide,” from the Cuban newspaper Granma(February 21)*
- *Revolutionary Appreciation and Respect to Fidel Castro, a letter from the Democratic Socialist Perspective of Australia (February 19)*

A Message to the People of Cuba

Dear compatriots:

The moment has come to nominate and elect the State Council, its President, its Vice-Presidents and Secretary.

For many years I have occupied the honourable position of President. On February 15, 1976 the Socialist Constitution was approved with the free, direct and secret vote of over 95% of the people with the right to cast a vote. The first National Assembly was established on December 2nd that same year; this elected the State Council and its presidency. Before that, I had been a Prime Minister for almost 18 years. I always had the necessary prerogatives to carry forward the revolutionary work with the support of the overwhelming majority of the people.

There were those overseas who, aware of my critical health condition, thought that my provisional resignation, on July 31, 2006, to the position of President of the State Council, which I left to First Vice-President Raul Castro Ruz, was final. But Raul, who is also minister of the Armed Forces on account of his own personal merits, and the other comrades of the Party and State leadership were unwilling to consider me out of public life despite my unstable health condition.

It was an uncomfortable situation for me vis-à-vis an adversary which had done everything possible to get rid of me, and I felt reluctant to comply.

Later, in my necessary retreat, I was able to recover the full command of my mind as well as the possibility for much reading and meditation. I had enough physical strength to write for many hours, which I shared with the corresponding rehabilitation and recovery programs. Basic

common sense indicated that such activity was within my reach. On the other hand, when referring to my health I was extremely careful to avoid raising expectations since I felt that an adverse ending would bring traumatic news to our people in the midst of the battle. Thus, my first duty was to prepare our people both politically and psychologically for my absence after so many years of struggle. I kept saying that my recovery “was not without risks.”

My wishes have always been to discharge my duties to my last breath. That’s all I can offer.

To my dearest compatriots, who have recently honoured me so much by electing me a member of the Parliament where so many agreements should be adopted of utmost importance to the destiny of our Revolution, I am saying that I will neither aspire to nor accept, I repeat, I will neither aspire to nor accept the positions of President of the State Council and Commander in Chief.

In short letters addressed to Randy Alonso, Director of the Round Table National TV Program — letters which at my request were made public — I discreetly introduced elements of this message I am writing today, when not even the addressee of such letters was aware of my intention. I trusted Randy, whom I knew very well from his days as a student of journalism. In those days I met almost on a weekly basis with the main representatives of the university students from the provinces at the library of the large house in Kohly where they lived. Today, the entire country is an immense university.

Following are some paragraphs chosen from the letter addressed to Randy on December 17, 2007:

“I strongly believe that the answers to the current problems facing Cuban society, which has, as an average, a twelfth grade of education, almost a million university graduates, and a real possibility for all its citizens to become educated without their being in any way discriminated against, require more variables for each concrete problem than those contained in a chess game. We cannot ignore one single detail; this is not an easy path to take, if the intelligence of a human being in a revolutionary society is to prevail over instinct.

“My elemental duty is not to cling to positions, much less to stand in the way of younger persons, but rather to contribute my own experience and ideas whose modest value comes from the exceptional era that I had the privilege of living in.

“Like Niemeyer, I believe that one has to be consistent right up to the end.”

Letter from January 8, 2008:

“...I am a firm supporter of the united vote (a principle that preserves the unknown merits), which allowed us to avoid the tendency to copy what came to us from countries of the former socialist bloc, including the portrait of the one candidate, as singular as his solidarity towards Cuba. I deeply respect that first attempt at building socialism, thanks to which we were able to continue along the path we had chosen.”

And I reiterated in that letter that "...I never forget that 'all of the world's glory fits in a kernel of corn.'"

Therefore, it would be a betrayal to my conscience to accept a responsibility requiring more mobility and dedication than I am physically able to offer. This I say devoid of all drama.

Fortunately, our revolution can still count on cadres from the old guard and others who were very young in the early stages of the process. Some were very young, almost children, when they joined the fight on the mountains and later they have given glory to the country with their heroic performance and their internationalist missions. They have the authority and the experience to guarantee the replacement. There is also the intermediate generation which learned together with us the basics of the complex and almost unattainable art of organizing and leading a revolution.

The path will always be difficult and require from everyone's intelligent effort. I distrust the seemingly easy path of apologetics or its antithesis the self-flagellation. We should always be prepared for the worst variable. The principle of being as prudent in success as steady in adversity cannot be forgotten. The adversary to be defeated is extremely strong; however, we have been able to keep it at bay for half a century.

This is not my farewell to you. My only wish is to fight as a soldier in the battle of ideas. I shall continue to write under the heading of "Reflections by comrade Fidel." It will be just another weapon you can count on. Perhaps my voice will be heard. I shall be careful.

Thank you.

Fidel Castro Ruz

February 18, 2008, 5:30 p.m.

Fidel's Political Stature Praised Worldwide

(from Granma, newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, February 21, 2008)

Dignitaries and public figures from around the world heaped praise Wednesday on Fidel Castro for his political stature after the Cuban leader announced he would not seek or accept reelection as president and commander and chief, when the new Cuban parliament convenes on Sunday.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez told VTV viewers in a telephone interview that Fidel will always be on the front line.

"Fidel didn't resign," noted Chavez adding, "People like Fidel never retire."

In Brazil, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, said that for the tranquility of Latin America it is important that this process take place calmly under the initiative of the revolutionary leader.

"The great legend carries on. Fidel Castro is one of the great legends in the history of humanity," said Lula.

Likewise, Bolivian President Evo Morales called Fidel a historic, revolutionary and anti-imperialist leader from whom he learned a lot, above all from his commitment to his people and the peoples of the world.

“Nobody can ignore that independent of the post he holds, Fidel Castro will continue being an undisputed leader, the moral authority of the people of Cuba, of the Cuban revolution and beyond,” said Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega at a press conference in San Salvador.

China expressed its hope that Fidel Castro promptly recovers his health and repeated its intention to further strengthen the ties of friendship with Cuba.

In Spain, visiting Honduran President Manuel Zelaya said that his country’s relations with Cuba “will not change.” Cuban teachers and doctors are currently working in Honduras.

Mexican Senator Rosario Ibarra said Fidel is a “giant of freedom” and an example for many generations. “Personally I was very moved by the beautiful message from a person whom to me will always be the *Comandante*.”

In a session of the Jamaican parliament, Primer Minister Bruce Holding praised the firmness and courage of Fidel and highlighted his unwavering commitment to the cause of his people.

Former Jamaican Primer Minister Portia Simpson-Miller said, “he is a legend, a giant, a champion.”

The Angolan National Liberation Movement (MPLA) said that the legacy of President Fidel Castro must be taken into account.

The Foreign ministry of Trinidad and Tobago issued a communiqué in which it recognizes and salutes the leadership of Fidel.

From Argentina, Chief of Cabinet Alberto Fernandez defended the “good ties” with Cuba and praised Fidel Castro, “a man to whom history will dedicate many pages.”

Revolutionary appreciation and respect to Fidel Castro

To Comrade Fidel Castro Ruz,
Commander in Chief,
President of the Republic of Cuba

Dearest Comrade:

Your comrades in the Democratic Socialist Perspective in Australia join millions of others around the world in offering our deepest appreciation and respect for your long and exemplary revolutionary service as President of the Republic of Cuba. In a world being condemned by capitalism to war, poverty, injustice, and now, an unprecedented global environmental crisis, the great example of revolutionary Cuba, and your personal leadership, have been beacons of hope.

Here on the other side of the world to Cuba, we are campaigning for the government of our wealthy country to simply match the medical and education aid that Cuba has provided to our

neighbour, the newly independent, but poor and small nation of Timor Leste. This says something very profound about revolutionary Cuba. Cuba's aid, based on international solidarity not the advancement of corporate profit, speaks to the hearts and minds of the ordinary people in our region. It champions the cause of socialism through deeds more eloquent and persuasive than many words.

It will be hard for others to match your historic leadership, but we are confident that the Cuban revolution, which has survived the unremitting and ruthless hostility of its powerful imperialist neighbour, will find the resources to live up to your fine example in revolutionary leadership.

For our part, we repledge our complete solidarity for the Cuban revolution, the other socialist revolutions in the making and those which are still to come. Every revolution that takes place in this 21st century will in no small part owe a large debt to the Cuban revolutionary example and Cuban solidarity.

While your role as head of a great revolutionary state has come to an end, your role as revolutionary teacher and inspirer of millions in struggle for a better world, continues. We are privileged to continue as some of your proudest students.

Revolutionary salute!

Peter Boyle,

National Secretary

on behalf of all the members of the Democratic Socialist Perspective in Australia

Socialist Voice #233, February 24, 2008

Venezuela: Danger Signs for the Revolution

By Kiraz Janicke and Federico Fuentes

(Caracas, 22 February 2008) In recent weeks, external and internal pressure against Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution, as the process of change led by socialist President Hugo Chavez is known, has intensified dramatically.

It is clear that US imperialism and the US-backed Venezuelan opposition see the defeat of Chavez's proposed constitutional reforms on December 2 as a green light to push forward their plans to destabilize the government.

In addition, growing internal problems, with a strengthening of the right-wing of the Chavista movement — known as the “endogenous right,” who support implementing some reforms without breaking with capitalism — pose a serious threat to the survival of the revolution.

Chavez's proposed constitutional reforms were aimed at institutionalizing greater popular power and increasing restrictions on capitalists to the benefit of working people. In response, the capitalist-owned private media launched a campaign based on lies and disinformation aimed at confusing the Venezuelan people.

Combined with low intensity economic sabotage — contributing to shortages of basic goods such as milk — the opposition was able to stoke the discontent that exists among the poor over problems such as corruption and bureaucratism.

Nearly 3 million people who voted for Chavez in the December 2006 presidential election abstained in the referendum, handing the opposition its first electoral victory since Chavez came to power in 1998.

Imperialist offensive

Attempting to build on this, a renewed US offensive has been unleashed aimed at isolating Chavez internationally, and undermining the process of Latin American integration spearheaded by Venezuela.

A key part of the strategy has involved fanning the flames of conflict between Venezuela and neighbouring Colombia. A dispute broke out after right-wing Colombian President Alvaro Uribe initially invited Chavez to help negotiate with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) — Colombia's largest left-wing guerrilla group — over a potential prisoner swap with the Colombian state, only to abruptly terminate Chavez's role in November.

Chavez nonetheless negotiated the unilateral release on January 10 of two prisoners held by the FARC. He also called for an end to the inclusion of the FARC on lists of banned terrorist organizations as a step towards finding a political solution to Colombia's decades-long civil war.

The US responded by having a number of high-profile US officials visit Colombia and verbally attack Venezuela.

Although “not aware of any specific support Mr. Chavez has provided the FARC,” the Pentagon’s joint chief of staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, in January still levelled false allegations that Chavez was granting the FARC “strategic support.”

John Walters, the director of the US Office of National Drug Control Policy, accused Chavez on January 29 of being a “major facilitator of the international drug trade,” despite an increase in interdiction of drug trafficking by the Venezuelan state.

The most serious imperialist attack came via a series of court orders obtained by US oil giant ExxonMobil, backed by the US State Department, to freeze US\$12 billion worth of assets of Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA, in both British and Dutch courts — a move described by Chavez as part of an “economic war.”

The move is in retaliation to the nationalization of ExxonMobil investments in Venezuela’s Orinoco oil belt last year. PDVSA provides up to \$13 billion a year for government-initiated social programs that provide free education and healthcare to Venezuela’s poor.

ExxonMobil’s actions are intended to also send a message to other Latin American countries considering resource nationalization — imperialism will fight back.

Internal destabilization

The Venezuelan opposition is also intensifying its destabilization campaign. The previously hopelessly divided opposition, boosted in confidence by the referendum results, is working towards a strong, unified campaign for the November elections for state governors and mayors.

This is combined with increasing extra-parliamentary destabilization, including a stepping up of economic sabotage by capitalists — reminiscent of the sabotage against the left-wing Chilean government that preceded the US-backed military coup by General Augusto Pinochet in 1973.

The campaign involves the hoarding, speculation and smuggling of food, contributing to shortages. This is combined with a virulent media campaign aimed at fuelling discontent.

The opposition is increasing its focus on the poor majority that make up Chavez’s support base. It is seeking to take advantage of discontent to infiltrate the barrios through what it calls “popular networks,” which work to spread rumours, promote discontent and divisions among Chavistas — and mobilize people against the government.

According to Eva Golinger, who has exposed the extent of US intervention into Venezuela, these networks receive funding and training from the US government-funded USAID.

There are also reports of growing links between right-wing Colombian paramilitaries, organized crime and sections of the Venezuelan opposition, especially in the states bordering Colombia. Large landowners have contracted paramilitaries to murder at least 190 campesinos (peasants) in recent years in an attempt to sabotage the land reform process promoted by the government.

Paramilitaries have also developed a presence in Caracas barrios. Funded by local businesses and dressed as civilians, they engage in drug dealing and act as hired assassins. This has helped impede community organizing.

In response to such pressure, Chavez has called for greater unity within the revolution.

Chavista divisions

However, serious divisions exist within the Bolivarian movement, which includes powerful pro-capitalist economic and political blocs — some with important influence in the military. This sector controls a number of ministries and a large part of the National Assembly, as well as mayor and governor offices, and is linked to a state bureaucracy unwilling to cede power.

There is also a more radical left, strong among the grassroots as well as elements within the state, which wants to deepen the process and overcome the corruption and bureaucratism holding back the revolution's advance.

Since the peak of the period of intensive mobilization by the poor and working people against the US-backed attempts to bring down the government — with the failed coup in 2002, the oil industry shutdown in 2002-03 and the recall referendum in 2004 — the level of ongoing popular mobilization has decreased significantly.

Under the whip of the counter-revolution, the oppressed demonstrated their willingness to fight — and ability to defeat — attempts by the old elite to reclaim power and eradicate the gains associated with the Bolivarian revolution.

However, with the weakening of the opposition after each defeat, combined with increased living standards for the poor, frustration with the state bureaucracy sabotaging those gains has become a bigger concern for many.

These problems have been exacerbated by a growing gap between government rhetoric and reality. Also badly undermining the revolution has been the severe weakness of the bitterly divided workers' movement.

These factors have impeded the creation of a unified force based on the grassroots militants that would be capable of leading the deepening of the revolution in the direction of socialism — as repeatedly called for by Chavez.

In this context the endogenous right-wing has grown in strength. Many of these forces, which give lip service to the goal of socialism, publicly called for a "Yes" vote in the referendum but worked behind the scenes to discourage voting for the radical reforms that threatened their interests.

By promoting a "personality cult" around Chavez, the right has sought to silence criticism of its own actions, presenting such attacks as being against Chavez and assisting US imperialism.

The conflict between left and right within the Bolivarian movement is most clearly expressed in the struggle over the formation of the new United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

Called for by Chavez to create a political instrument to unite militants on the ground and help lead the struggle for socialism, it has become a battleground between bureaucratic sectors determined to keep control and activists from the popular movements fighting to build a mass, democratic and genuinely revolutionary party.

Such a party, if it succeeded in uniting the base with the leadership of Chavez over the heads of the bureaucrats, would be a severe blow against the right-wing forces that have maintained positions through factional power blocs.

The popular sectors have had a strong influence in the direction and discourse of the founding congress that began in January and ends in March. However, the outcome is far from decided, with the right-wing fighting hard.

A controversy has broken out over false claims by former vice-president Jorge Rodriguez (now national coordinator of the PSUV) and Diosdado Cabello (governor of Miranda, a major capitalist with strong influence in the military and identified as a key leader of the endogenous right) that National Assembly deputy Luis Tascon had been expelled from the PSUV by a unanimous vote of delegates.

No such vote occurred, and the question of Tascon's expulsion is still being fought over. However Rodriguez and Cabello have been forced to back down, declaring Tascon has been "suspended" and will be given a right to reply after the congress has decided on the statutes and principles of the new party — a decision also never debated or voted on by delegates.

Tascon has made corruption allegations against Cabello's brother, now head of Venezuela's tax agency. Chavez had called for people to expose corruption.

Rodriguez and Cabello have also argued for the new party to be subordinated to the government and stated it is not necessary to include anti-capitalism as one of its principles, which have become key points of debate.

Other organizational disputes have resulted from manoeuvring by the hand-picked congress organizing committee, specifically on the question of how documents to be voted on will be drafted and whether they will be presented to the PSUV ranks with enough time for discussion.

Class struggle

Attempts to silence dissent and bureaucratically take over the PSUV are part of the plans of the endogenous right, which aspires to "Chavismo without Chavez" — and without socialism. Such actions aim to further demoralize the popular sectors.

These divisions reflect the class struggle within the revolutionary process.

In an interview with *Green Left Weekly* in 2006 Tascon argued: "there will undoubtedly be a confrontation between different Chavistas. I am sure there will be a conflict of particular interests between the left and the right. But it will not be the traditional right [who are in the opposition], but a Chavista right-wing."

As a process that aims to overcome the subordination of the Venezuelan economy — and state — to the needs of US imperialism, broad forces have been attracted to the Bolivarian movement.

It has included those who hoped that breaking from US domination would assist economic development within a capitalist framework, right through to revolutionary socialists for whom nothing short of a thorough-going social revolution will solve the needs of the oppressed majority.

Under attack from imperialism and the local capitalist class, the revolution has increasingly radicalized, with Chavez repeatedly insisting the goal was socialism.

However, at the same time the revolution swung further left, the strength of right-wing forces has increased within much of both the pro-Chavez political parties and the notoriously corrupt state.

This contradiction is being fought out over the question of whose interests the PSUV will serve — the oppressed majority or the pro-capitalist bureaucrats? The organization and unity of the left forces will be crucial to determining the future of the PSUV — and the revolution.

The internal and external battles are clearly linked, as revealed by the fact that discontent over problems either caused or exacerbated by the Chavista right helped cause the defeat of the constitutional reform — a victory for the US-backed opposition that has given it badly needed momentum.

Without a real “revision, rectification and relaunch” of the revolution — the “three Rs” Chavez has called for — the Bolivarian forces could face significant defeats in the elections at the end of the year. This could pave the way for an escalated opposition offensive to drive Chavez from government, via constitutional or other means.

[From Green Left Weekly. Kiraz Janicke and Federico Fuentes are part of the GLW Caracas bureau, and are members of the Democratic Socialist Perspective, a Marxist group in Australia that is part of the Socialist Alliance.]