

Editorial

The New Multilateralism of George W. Bush

In his December 1 speech in Halifax, U.S. President George W. Bush stated that he is interested in strengthening international institutions such as the United Nations and in building a new multilateral consensus in the “war on terror”. However, he immediately made it clear that he was not talking about making concessions to the European Union, Canada or others who have been critical of the unilateralism of his regime, especially in regard to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Rather, he expects his critics to drop their criticisms and line up behind his decisions. So, George Bush’s “multilateralism” is indistinguishable from his unilateralism. It is the kind of multilateralism practiced by Roman emperors who enlisted conquered peoples in the conquest of yet more territories and peoples.

There were many pundits who suggested that Bush would “mellow” in his second term in order to concentrate on his “legacy”. They seem to have missed the point that the only legacy that Bush seems to care about is empire-building. His cabinet has been purged of any dissenting voices and it is clear from Bush’s statements in Halifax that he has no intention of altering his course on any front. The U.S. war against the people of Iraq is being pursued with a renewed vengeance and the U.S. is trying to foment a civil war in Ukraine in order to weaken its Russian “allies”.

The unilateralism of the U.S. under George W. Bush is not an anomaly, nor is it something which has emerged out of his personal psychology. Rather, it is a consequence of the sharpening contradictions between the big imperialist powers over which will

See page 2: Bush’s Multilateralism

Commentary

Violence Against Women is Endemic to the Capitalist System

Fifteen years ago on December 6, 1989, 14 young women engineering students in a classroom at l’Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal were shot and killed by Marc Lepine, who then turned his gun on himself. Since that date, December 6 has been marked in Canada as a day to bring attention to the issue of violence against women. While it is appropriate to highlight this problem, the way in which this tragic event is used does more to mystify and cover up the source of violence against women in Canadian society than it does to clarify the issue.

The murder of these 14 young women was a horrific crime committed by a mentally ill man. In his twisted logic, Lepine saw women as the source of all of his own failures in life. If there is a lesson to be

learned from this tragedy it is that there are consequences to the way in which the mentally ill are treated in our society. During the 1980s, dozens of institutions for the mentally ill were closed and patients were literally put out on the streets with little or no assistance or follow-up. As a result, thousands of people live and die in the most wretched conditions, discarded by society. Whether or not the tragedy in Montreal could have been averted if better care and assistance were provided to the mentally ill cannot be said, just as it cannot be established that tighter gun controls or more police could have prevented it. This is the nature of random, isolated events.

Marc Lepine’s crime has become a symbol for

See page 4: Violence Against Women

A Dangerous Situation is Being Created in Ukraine

The Western media has been euphoric about the decision of the Ukrainian Supreme Court to invalidate the results of the second round of Ukraine's presidential elections and order a new run-off vote between Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich. This is being touted as a victory for democracy and the will of the Ukrainian people. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather, it is a victory for the U.S. and the European Union (EU) and one more step towards establishing their control over the Ukrainian government and the wealth of the Ukrainian nation.

The re-vote scheduled for December 26 will do nothing to defuse the crisis which has been created in Ukraine by the foreign imperialists – the U.S., EU and Russia. If Yanukovich wins again there will be cries of fraud by Yushchenko and his Western imperialist backers, regardless of how cleanly the election is run. The "Orange Revolution", organized and financed by American and European finance capitalists and intelligence agencies, will continue until the government is brought down. This was the strategy used in Yugoslavia to bring down the Milosevic government and in Georgia to bring down the Shevardnadze government. Even before the new election, Yushchenko's Western imperialist supporters are talking about applying the same "shock therapy" to Ukraine that they used to rob and destroy so many other eastern European countries.

If Yushchenko wins and proceeds with his plans for Ukraine to join NATO, the governors of Eastern Ukraine have promised to move towards autonomy or secession. Since Eastern Ukraine contains most of the country's industry, mineral wealth and oil, such a move would almost certainly lead to civil war. As in Yugoslavia, the U.S. and EU will support those seeking to bring Ukraine under the domination of Western imperialism, while Russia will support those who wish to remain under Russian domination.

However, unlike Yugoslavia which was peripheral to Russian interests, Ukraine is a crucial part of the new Russian empire being constructed by Vladimir Putin. It is Russia's largest trading partner and a major source of raw materials for Russian industry. There is also a large population of Russians in Ukraine, especially in the eastern areas, much of which is intermarried with the Ukrainian population.

The relationship between Russia and Ukraine is, therefore, closer even than the relationship between the U.S. and Canada. Losing Ukraine would be an enormous blow to Russia's prestige, in addition to being a huge economic blow. There is little doubt that Russia will put up a determined fight to prevent that from happening.

Ukraine is a pawn in a geopolitical chess game between the U.S., EU and Russia and the prize is not just Ukraine itself, but control of Europe. The loss of Ukraine would weaken Russia's imperial ambitions and make it vulnerable to attack from Western Europe. It would force Russia to seek an alliance either with the U.S. or EU in order to protect itself and advance its interests. The history of Europe since the time of Napoleon indicates that no imperialist power can control all of Europe unless it has a military alliance with Russia. The stakes in Ukraine are, therefore, very high and whatever the outcome it is bound to further exacerbate the inter-imperialist contradictions and the danger of a much broader conflict.

Bush's Multilateralism...from page 1

reap the lion's share of the profits generated by the intensified exploitation of the world's people. The U.S. followed a policy of multilateralism when its Western European allies were so weak and afraid of the Soviet Union that they were forced to agree with whatever policies Washington decided upon. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the growing economic might of Germany, France and Japan and the slipping American economy, the U.S. is no longer in a position to dictate to its "multilateral" allies. Therefore, it has dropped the charade of multilateralism and openly defies the international community when it serves its needs to do so. At the same time, the U.S. is genuinely interested in restoring the kind of multilateralism that it practiced in the past where it calls the shots and its allies fall into line. So, a so-called new interest in "consensus-building" and strengthening of the UN should not be construed as a change in direction of the Bush regime. It is merely an indication that U.S. imperialism is using everything at its disposal to shore up its shaky empire.

For Your Information

Terrorism and Imperialism - The “Blowback” Phenomenon

This is the seventh in *Modern Communism's* series on the relationship between terrorism and imperialism.

The CIA first coined the term “blowback” during the 1980s to describe the potential for groups receiving direct financial and military aid from the U.S. to turn against American imperialism. Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S., the term has become more commonly used, with many published commentaries describing those attacks as blowback.

Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda terrorist network, which was responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks, was born out of the funding provided by the CIA to mujahadeen fighters in Afghanistan following the 1979 Soviet invasion. The first funding for the mujahadeen was authorized by the Carter administration in 1979, under the direction of Carter’s national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. In a 1998 interview with French journalist Vincent Javert of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Brzezinski, asked whether he regretted having armed and financed mujahadeen, replied, “What is more important to the history of the world... the Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?”

The Reagan administration continued support for the mujahadeen fighters in Afghanistan and increased the military and financial aid they received directly from the U.S., as well as from its Saudi allies. During the Reagan years, Afghani mujahadeen received close to \$6 billion in weaponry alone from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia (*New York Times*, 1998). Other funds flowed to the mujahadeen for recruitment of fighters from throughout the Arab world. In his book *The New Jackals*, while examining the link between bin-Laden and terrorism, Simon Reeve notes that bin-Laden rose to prominence during this period organizing recruitment campaigns in several countries and then flying recruits to CIA-funded and built training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Recruits received training from ISI [Pakistani intelligence] agents, who themselves received training at the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Total funding given

to the mujahadeen by the U.S. and its allies during the 1980s has been estimated at \$60 billion (Steve Coll, *Washington Post*).

The blowback phenomenon has also played out in the Middle East. Israel, which has used suicide bombings carried out by groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad as one of the pretexts for maintaining its illegal and brutal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, initially provided direct and tacit support to these groups.

Hamas, for example, was formally created in the mid-1980s but originated as a Palestinian offshoot of an Egyptian group, the Islamic Brotherhood. The group began organizing in the occupied territories in the 1970s, during a period when the PLO was in turmoil after its expulsion from Jordan. Sheikh Yasin, the Hamas leader assassinated earlier this year by Israel, emerged as a leader during this period. Yasin condemned the PLO and its leadership as “pork eaters and wine drinkers” and called for Palestinians to abandon the struggle for a secular, independent Palestine and embrace the idea of an Islamic state. Yasin’s open hostility to the PLO was viewed favourably by senior Israeli intelligence officials, who believed that Islamic groups would split the Palestinian population and weaken their resistance to occupation. The Islamic Brotherhood was granted charitable status by Israel in 1979, and allowed to operate freely in the West Bank and Gaza Strip at the same time that the PLO was an illegal organization, with membership alone used as justification for arrest.

In an interview with Graham Usher, a British journalist who has reported on the Middle East for the *Economist* and the *Guardian*, the former Israeli military governor of Gaza, General Yitzhak Segev, said he even provided direct financial support to Islamic groups operating in Gaza. “The Israeli government gives me a budget and we extend some financial aid to Islamic groups via Mosques and religious schools, in order to help create a force that can stand up against the leftist forces that support the PLO,” he said. Other reporters have noted that Israeli forces turned a blind eye to some of the violence perpetrated by Islamic groups when it was directed against the PLO or other secular groups.

Winnipeggers Protest Bush Visit

Over 100 people in Winnipeg braved the bitter cold on November 30 to protest the visit to Canada of U.S. President George W. Bush. Protesters gathered near the corner of Portage and Main carrying signs denouncing the U.S. war against Iraq and opposing the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system.

The rally topped off almost a week of meetings in Winnipeg addressed by anti-BMD activist Bruce Gagnon. Mr. Gagnon has done extensive research on the missile defence system, including plans by the U.S. Pentagon to put weapons of various kinds, including nuclear weapons, in space. He called on Canadians to step up their activities in opposition to the U.S. program.

Violence Against Women...from page 1

everything from gun control to the problems of domestic violence. However, to use this tragedy in this way actually mystifies the causes of violence against women. Perhaps this is why the entire Canadian establishment embraces the December 6 memorials and uses them to bemoan violence against women as a terrible thing about which something really should be done, while their system perpetuates violence against women on a daily basis.

However, the issue of violence against women cannot be reduced to the murder of women by a mentally ill man. Nor can it be reduced to a matter of domestic violence, the “male psyche” or politically incorrect language. These are symptoms of the problems and to treat the symptoms as the disease is superficial and belittling. In order to get to the root of the problem of why there is violence against women one must look at who benefits from this violence and how they benefit.

There is no real mystery here. Everywhere we turn we find a culture which denigrates and degrades women. There are the multi-billion dollar pornography and prostitution industries which commodify women and dehumanize relationships between people. Alongside of this there is the religious right with its antiquated notion of women as inferior beings whose place is in the home, to serve and obey their husbands. The religious right, both the fundamentalists and the Catholic Church, talk endlessly about the sacredness of marriage and the sacredness of life, but they are the worst abusers of women and molesters of children. They are also the loudest in calling for violence against those who oppose capitalism and colonial oppression, against the mentally ill and the poor and against those who commit crimes. They are the greatest defenders of the capitalist system which profits from the dehumanization and degradation of women. They are the greatest proponents of sending young men and women off to wage wars of aggression against the men, women and children of other countries so that

the profits of the multinational corporations are maximized. Then there are the capitalists in general who exploit and oppress women to exert downward pressure on the wages of the entire working class, thereby increasing their profits. The purveyors of pornography, the religious right and the capitalists all contribute to the creation of a culture in which women are commodified, dehumanized and degraded, and violence against them is legitimized.

In a society where violence and degradation of women is so profitable, how is it possible for the culture not to reflect this? How is it possible to prevent such anti-woman ideas from permeating the entire society, from top to bottom, including the minds of unstable individuals like Marc Lepine?

This dehumanization and commodification of women is the real source of violence against women. Furthermore, it does not victimize only women, but men as well. In dehumanizing women and commodifying human relationships, men, too, are being dehumanized and degraded, reduced to the level of consumers and voyeurs. Only the destruction of this unhealthy culture and the capitalist system that gives rise to it can restore dignity to women and men and put an end to violence against women.

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