

Editorial

## **Canada's "Non-Participation" in the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defence**

Last week the Canadian government finally announced that it will not formally participate in the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system being pursued by the Bush administration. Such an announcement has been expected for several months due to opposition to the scheme by a vast majority of Canadians and a significant section of the Liberal caucus. However, Canada's newly appointed ambassador to the U.S., Frank McKenna, exposed the fraudulent nature of Canada's "non-participation" when he pointed out that the involvement of Norad in the BMD program means that Canada is already effectively a participant in the BMD system. Prime Minister Paul Martin, Foreign Minister Pierre Pettigrew and Defence Minister Bill Graham were all quick to deny McKenna's assertion, but they did not

actually explain how exactly he was in error. Instead they further confused matters by talking nonsense about Canadian "sovereignty".

A year ago Paul Martin stated that participation in BMD was essential in order to defend Canadian sovereignty, claiming that sovereignty meant having a seat at the table where the decisions are made on whether or not to launch anti-ballistic missiles. The Conservative Party has now picked up on this logic and is attacking the Liberal government for its failure to defend Canadian sovereignty. Meanwhile, U.S. ambassador Paul Celucci stated that he was mystified about why Canada would refuse to exercise its sovereignty by joining the BMD and suggested that

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Commentary

## **Placating the Bully to the South**

Last week's federal budget included, among other things, an increase of \$12.8 billion in military spending. Prime Minister Paul Martin and Defence Minister Bill Graham emphasized this fact when they announced that Canada would not be formally signing on to the American Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) program, pointing out that Canada contributes to North American defence in many other ways, including peacekeeping abroad. Martin also expressed the hope that his government's decision on BMD would not impact negatively on Canadian companies bidding on lucrative contracts to build the BMD system.

Since the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, Canada has played the role of "mediator" and "peacekeeper", attempting to achieve through diplomatic means

those goals which the U.S. has been unable to accomplish militarily. In return for its services, Canada has received economic favours from the U.S. For example, Canada's peacekeeping role in Cyprus in the early 1960s prevented a split in NATO; in return the U.S. agreed to the Autopact which allowed U.S. auto manufacturing subsidiaries in Canada a guaranteed percentage of the North American market for automobiles. However, since the Bush administration took power in 2000 it has been pressuring all of its allies, including Canada, to endorse its aggressive imperialistic policies. This has caused a crisis for the Liberal government which is accustomed to playing quite a different role in support

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For Your Information

## **Venezuela Urges OAS to Condemn US Interference in its Affairs**

Speaking to a gathering of foreign ministers of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Paraguay on February 23, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez denounced U.S. attempts to destabilize the Chavez government and called on other Latin American countries to defend Venezuela's right to sovereignty and self-determination.

Quoting from Article 1 of the OAS charter, which states that the organization "has no powers other than those expressly conferred upon it by this Charter, none of whose provisions authorizes it to intervene in matters that are within the internal jurisdiction of the Member States", Rodriguez said the attack on the sovereignty of any member state represented a danger for all members.

Rodriguez's comments follow several recent statements by high-ranking members of the Bush administration who have charged that the Chavez government is destabilizing the region. The U.S. has also made it clear it is actively lobbying OAS members to isolate Venezuela.

"The absurdity of the accusations levied against our government would not bother us in the least if a multitude of facts did not exist that prove that when such statements are made, it's because, sooner or later, the attack will follow," he noted. "This is what happened to motivate the coup in April 2002 in Venezuela, and similarly occurred with the attack on the oil industry and the economy at large in December of the same year. It is what happened with Allende, it is what happened in the Dominican Republic, it is what happened in Guatemala and countless other cases."

Responding directly to rumours that the CIA is working with reactionary forces within Venezuela to assassinate President Chavez, Rodriguez put the OAS on alert that any such attempt would seriously destabilize the region, to the detriment of all its peoples.

Rodriguez went on to outline the major challenge Venezuela is facing: that of the poverty in which so many Venezuelans live, despite the country's rich

natural resources.

"Decades of neglect of the most basic economic, social, cultural, and even political rights in Venezuela left as a result a hurtful and inexcusable level of poverty, reaching up to 80 percent of the population. As such, esteemed ambassadors, our people are, by majority, a poor people," he said. "From this emerges a second elemental conclusion: the realization that democracy in a country like Venezuela, whose concrete reality is one of poverty, depends on giving the large majority of the country the opportunity to participate, that is, the overcoming of poverty becomes the government's first reason for being."

"How could one consider oneself a democracy that respects human rights when 80 percent of the population is subjected to the daily outrage of poverty and its terrible consequences? What type of democracy can be built upon illiteracy and the ignorance it breeds, malnutrition, unemployment, and the various other plagues that often accompany the drama of poverty? In the case of Venezuela, and in many other cases, I suspect, the principle of a government of the people, by the people, and for the people can only become a reality by giving power to the poor when they represent, as in our case, the large majority of the population."

He concluded with a call for Latin American cooperation. "In the name of all Venezuelans and our peaceful and democratic government, I would like to convey a message to all the governments represented in this forum: Venezuela, much like most countries, has but one enemy to defeat. That enemy is poverty. Against it we need to concentrate our strength, our every resource, all our capacities, and our will."

Two days after Rodriguez' speech, Venezuela and Argentina signed a joint economic agreement under which Venezuela will provide oil in exchange for Argentinean agricultural products and hospital equipment.

## For Your Information

### **New Israeli Army Head Implicated in War Crimes**

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz has announced the appointment of Major General Dan Halutz as the next chief of staff of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Halutz's appointment must be confirmed by the Israeli cabinet, expected some time in the next two weeks.

Peace groups in Israel have been quick to protest the appointment, noting that Halutz, an airforce pilot, has been implicated in war crimes, including the July 2003 "targetted assassination" of a Hamas leader. Halutz gave the order to drop a one ton bomb on an apartment building in a crowded Gaza neighbourhood - besides the Hamas leader, 14 people were killed in the attack, the majority children. Peace activists, including the "refusnik" IDF soldiers and pilots who have refused to serve in the occupied territories have petitioned the High Court of Justice asking it to intervene and ban Halutz's appointment. The petitioners write that "Halutz is responsible for one of the most grave acts in the IDF's history," and deplore making "someone who expressed himself that the large scale killing of innocent children and women is well within the moral standards of the IDF" the deputy commander of all IDF soldiers.

The petitioners are referring to an interview Halutz gave shortly after the July 2003 bombing. Speaking to a reporter from *Ha'aretz* newspaper, Halutz dismissed criticisms of the operation, describing it as "militarily and morally proper." Halutz claimed that

IDF intelligence led them to believe the apartment building would be empty except for the Hamas leader and his guards, but also said it was legitimate for the IDF to carry out targetted assassinations even if they know there will be civilian casualties. When asked directly how many civilian casualties would be too many, he replied "I don't know" and added the end of assassinating a Hamas leader had justified the means.

Halutz was also asked for a response to the suggestion put forward by the Israeli peace group Gush Shalom that IDF pilots who carry out these kind of missions should be tried as international war criminals. Halutz suggested it was the peace activists who should be tried – for treason "What I have to say about those people is this: We live in a democratic country, and expressing an opinion is always allowed, but betrayal is not allowed. ...The proper offense [for their call to have IDF pilots tried at the Hague] as defined by law is treason and they should be tried in Israel."

Following the bombing, Israeli peace activists also launched an internal campaign, plastering posters and buying billboards around the country that featured a picture of the Major General and the caption "Fly Halutz home – restore the IDF's combat ethics" and circulated a petition calling for Halutz to be barred from holding any senior position in the IDF.

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of U.S. imperialism.

The first challenge for the Liberals came two years ago when George W. Bush insisted that Canada join in the illegal invasion of Iraq, something which the vast majority of Canadians opposed. The Chretien Liberals did their best to ensure UN endorsement of the invasion, but when that failed they had no option but to decline the American invitation. However, Chretien also increased Canada's commitment of troops to Afghanistan and provided essential naval support in the Persian Gulf as a means to support the American war effort through the back door. At the time, Chretien pointed

to this support and pleaded with the Bush administration not to cut Canadian companies out of contracts to rebuild Iraq after the war.

Similarly, last year when the U.S. increased pressure on its allies to send troops to Iraq to assist in the occupation, the Martin Liberals declined because of popular opposition. Then, in order to placate the Americans, Martin assisted in the overthrow of the democratically-elected government of Haiti and sent Canadian forces to assist the U.S. and France in occupying that nation. The same pattern has now emerged in regard to the BMD program.

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the U.S. may refuse to shoot down missiles aimed at Canada.

The issue of whether or not Canada participates formally in the U.S. BMD system has little to do with sovereignty. As McKenna has pointed out, it is already participating in reality. However, even if that were not the case, regardless of whether or not a Canadian is sitting at the table, the decision on when to launch missiles will clearly be made by Americans. In fact, for the BMD system to work, assuming it ever does, the decision to launch anti-ballistic missiles must be made within seconds of the launch of an incoming missile while it is still in its acceleration phase. Therefore, the decision will not even be made by a human being, but by a computer, and all of the talk of "being at the table" is sheer sophistry.

Where the issue of sovereignty is relevant is on the question of whether or not the U.S. has a right to launch missiles that fly through Canadian airspace and whether or not it has the right to intercept incoming missiles over Canada, thereby endangering the lives of Canadians. Both scenarios are not only part of the BMD program, but also of every earlier U.S. missile defence system. That sovereignty was ceded by Canadian governments a long time ago, when they tacitly agreed that the lives of Canadians were not as important as the lives of Americans and that it was vital to intercept enemy missiles before they crossed the U.S. border. Furthermore, it is clear from the statements of successive U.S. presidents and military leaders that the interception of ballistic missiles would take place over Canadian territory whether or not the Canadian government agreed.

During the Cold War, Canada's close alliance with the U.S. meant that every major Canadian city was targeted by Warsaw Pact missiles. To the extent that U.S. anti-ballistic missiles defences were effective, vast areas of rural Canada would also have been laid waste by the radioactive fallout from the intercepted missiles. Therefore, North American defence actually meant the sacrifice of Canadians to protect the United States. Nothing has changed with the new BMD system. In other words, there is no viable defence of Canada once nuclear missiles start to fly. Therefore, the security of Canada and the Canadian people can only be protected by working to eliminate

the conditions which give rise to war in the first place, and by distancing Canada from the imperialist policy of the U.S., which is by far the most dangerous source of war in the present international situation.

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Unfortunately for the Martin Liberals, the Bush administration is completely incapable of appreciating the subtleties of international diplomacy and will not be placated with back door support. As a result, the U.S. pressure on the Martin government – both diplomatic and economic – is certain to increase in the future, which, in turn, will deepen the crisis facing the Canadian government.

## **Global Days of Action Against War March 19-21**

**Winnipeg Action:**

**Saturday March 19  
1:00 p.m.**

**Rally at Legislative Grounds  
March through downtown  
streets**

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**Editor: Ken Kaltornyk**

***To contact the Manitoba Branch of CPC(M-L):***

**Fax: 477-6741**

**Email: mrc-cpcml@mts.net**

**Internet: [www.modern-communism.ca](http://www.modern-communism.ca)**

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