

Editorial

Hands Off Cuba!

The July 31 announcement that Cuban president Fidel Castro was undergoing surgery and had temporarily delegated his major party and state responsibilities to his officially designated successor, Raul Castro, was met with a chorus of speculation and obscene jubilation in the United States. While a portion of the Cuban émigré community in Miami celebrated and dreamed about once again getting its hands on the wealth created by the Cuban people, the U.S. government and its various espionage agencies dusted off plans for the destabilization and overthrow of the Cuban government in the immediate “post-Castro” period. By contrast, the reports from Cuba indicate that the situation remains calm and the Cuban people and their state remain determined to defend their revolution regardless of

what develops.

Since the early nineteenth century, successive U.S. administrations have viewed Cuba as legitimate property of the United States and as a playground for rich Americans. Following the American victory over Spain in the Spanish-American War at the end of the nineteenth century the U.S. treated Cuba as a colony and routinely interfered militarily and politically in its internal affairs. The 1959 Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro put an end to Cuba’s colonial status and represented the first time in its history that Cuba could legitimately be called independent. By 1961, when it had become clear that the new Cuban government had no intention of relinquishing its hard-won independence or of submitting to U.S. dictate, the

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Commentary

Israel is Guilty of War Crimes

Spokespersons of the governments of Israel, the U.S. and Canada have been repeating endlessly that the Israeli aggression against the people of Lebanon is an act of “self-defence” in response to the abduction of two of its soldiers by Hezbollah. Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper went so far as to describe Israel’s wholesale attacks and invasion of Lebanon and its massive destruction of infrastructure and civilian homes as a “measured response”. However, as in every other case of Israeli aggression against its neighbours, the argument of “self-defence” is based on the deliberate falsification of reality, as well as the history of the region since 1948.

Israel states that Hezbollah fighters “kidnapped” two Israeli soldiers on July 12, 2006. Conveniently

for Israel, history apparently begins on that date, because then it is possible for the Israelis and their allies to ignore the 9,800 Palestinians and Lebanese citizens kidnapped by Israeli forces and still languishing in Israeli prisons. They also ignore the incursions by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) into Lebanese territory, their regular shelling of civilians in the south of Lebanon and continuing policy of assassination of “enemies of Israel” in the streets of Beirut, Gaza and other cities which have been going on for years. When Israel carries out such acts of aggression they are portrayed as legitimate “acts of self-defence” by a “small nation surrounded by enemies”, but when Hezbollah responds to the IDF murder of a Lebanese shepherd boy and the

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U.S. government imposed a brutal economic blockade against Cuba which it has maintained and intensified for the past 45 years. It also began a systematic campaign of state terrorism against the Cuban state and Cuban people, including numerous assassination attempts against Fidel Castro, bombings of Cuban hotels, airlines and economic institutions, and biological warfare against Cuban civilians and agricultural assets.

Despite the treachery of the U.S. imperialists and the attempts by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and his successors to convert Cuba into a Soviet neo-colony, the Cuban revolution has survived and Cuba has succeeded in following a sovereign and independent course. It has been an implacable opponent of colonialism, imperialism and neo-liberalism and a true friend to peoples everywhere who are fighting for independence and social progress. Despite the economic hardships caused by the U.S. blockade and the treachery of the new Russian rulers following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba has managed to build a self-reliant economy capable of supporting world class health and education systems which are free to all. It has also made significant headway in eliminating

social inequities and in ensuring that no one is abandoned to fend for themselves, which is something that neither the U.S. nor Canada can boast. Furthermore, while the loudest proponents of “human rights” and “humanitarianism”, such as the U.S. and Canada, have written off the poorest people of Africa and Latin America and have imposed neo-liberal economic restructuring programs on their countries which drive them into even deeper poverty, Cuba has sent tens of thousands of doctors to the most remote and poverty-stricken regions at no cost to the governments of those countries.

As a matter of principle, Cuba has the right to exist as a sovereign and independent nation as well as the right to the political and economic system of its choice. Furthermore, beyond matters of principle, Cuba’s consistent stand against the rich and powerful and in defence of the poor and weak has earned it an unrivaled place among today’s nations in the hearts of world’s people. Fidel’s Cuba may be a small and isolated country within the world capitalist order, but it has more friends and higher prestige than George Bush’s America can ever hope to enjoy. Progressive and justice-loving people everywhere hope for Fidel’s quick and complete recovery and wish him many more years at the head of the Cuban revolution.

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kidnapping of Hezbollah fighters by capturing a couple of IDF soldiers it is portrayed as an unforgivable act of war by so-called “terrorists”.

During the past three weeks, more than 400 Lebanese civilians have been killed by Israeli bombs and shells. Israel claims that these killings are “accidental”, but the evidence speaks otherwise. The world has seen pictures of refugee buses and ambulances destroyed by Israeli “smart bombs”. It has seen the carnage in Qana and the hypocrisy of the IDF which drops leaflets on Lebanese villages warning residents to flee and then destroys the exit roads and targets refugee columns. The admission by Israeli military spokespersons that the IDF is striving to destroy every residence within 30 kilometres of the border in order to establish a “buffer zone” establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt that civilian casualties are deliberate and not “collateral damage”. The Israelis and their supporters think that by

labelling these civilians as Hezbollah supporters their crimes are justified. However, attacks against civilians constitute war crimes no matter what the political or religious views those civilians may hold.

Defenders of Israel such as U.S. President George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who are not only justifying Israel’s actions but helping in various ways to facilitate them, are guilty of collaboration in the commission of those war crimes. In the case of George W. Bush the responsibility goes much further, since it is inconceivable that Israel would have launched the current aggression against Lebanon without prior approval from the White House. Once the Israeli invasion of Lebanon began, President Bush announced that he was fast-tracking the delivery of American “smart bombs” to Israel to replenish those it was dropping on Lebanese

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Israel Intensifies Attacks in Gaza

While the attention of the world has been focused on the Israeli assault against Lebanon, the large-scale military assault the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) began in Gaza on June 27 has also intensified. This attack was launched by the IDF after the capture of a single Israeli soldier by members of the military wing of Hamas. Over 100 Palestinians have been killed since then, including dozens of children and youth. Israeli troops have closed off Gaza from the outside world, sealing off the port, coastlines and airport, and have targeted civilian infrastructure. Unconfirmed media reports also suggest the IDF has been targeting limited food supplies within Gaza, deliberately cutting off fishers from their catch and seizing grain, fruits and vegetables destined for Gaza markets.

On August 3, the IDF moved to seal off the only remaining link Gaza has to the outside. About 50 Israeli tanks, accompanied by bulldozers, pushed

into an area near the Gaza-Egypt border and took up positions near the long-closed Gaza airport, according to residents and Palestinian security officials. The forces advanced about eight kilometres, the farthest since the offensive started in late June, and blocked a main highway and the eastern entrance to Rafah, a town on the Egyptian border.

Speaking in New York on August 3, a spokesperson for the United Nations noted that the number of artillery shells being fired by the IDF into Gaza had risen dramatically over the past few days. At least 1,050 shells were fired in one week, resulting, predictably, in civilian casualties and displacement. The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is currently using four schools to shelter over 1,300 Palestinians who have fled the constant shelling.

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apartments and hospitals. The U.S. ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, has been instrumental in preventing the UN from taking any action against Israel even after the deliberate Israeli bombing of a UN observer post and the killing of four UN observers. Bush, Blair and Harper have been unanimous in opposing any call for a cease-fire until after Israel accomplishes its goal of destroying Hezbollah.

The problem confronting Israel is that a goal it claimed it could accomplish in a week or two is now proving much more difficult than it imagined. The IDF is sustaining heavy casualties and has been forced to withdraw from at least one Lebanese village. Meanwhile, Hezbollah rockets continue to rain down on Israeli cities and Hezbollah has vowed to strike targets in Tel Aviv if Israel continues to bomb targets in Beirut. The more or less open Israeli objective of collectively punishing the Lebanese Shia community for its support of Hezbollah and its attempts to blackmail the Lebanese people into turning on Hezbollah have also abjectly failed. For the first time in decades, the entire Lebanese nation is unified in opposition to Israel and its U.S. backers.

The IDF may be one of the most powerful armies

in the world, but it is an army organized around the tactic of *blitzkrieg*. It is not well adapted to prolonged warfare. This is why, from the first days of the invasion, the U.S. has been talking about using NATO troops to occupy southern Lebanon and complete the disarming of Hezbollah. This plan also appears to be faltering since the Lebanese government has categorically refused to accept NATO troops on its soil and the U.S. has been unable to convince any of its NATO allies to commit troops to such a venture. The Americans also have not explained how they intend to accomplish with a relatively small NATO force what Israel failed to accomplish in more than a decade of occupation of southern Lebanon and what the U.S. and its allies have failed to accomplish after three years in Iraq and almost five years in Afghanistan. The U.S. and Israel have now been forced to backtrack on their earlier statements that a UN peacekeeping force would be unacceptable and are campaigning for the UN to step in and occupy southern Lebanon for the Israelis. However, regardless of what colour helmets they wear or what flag they operate under the problem remains the same. No occupation force can succeed in crushing the resistance of the Lebanese people so long as they refuse to accept foreign domination and interference in their internal affairs.

Winnipeg Demonstration Opposes Israeli Attacks Against Lebanon



Over 200 people gathered at the corner of Portage and Main on July 29 to oppose the Israeli attack against and invasion of Lebanon and the massacre of hundreds of Lebanese civilians. Marching behind a banner of the Peace Alliance of Winnipeg that declared “Winnipeg says no to war”, the protestors carried placards denouncing the invasion and the Harper government’s support for Israeli aggression.

A small group of people supporting the Israeli invasion gathered at the same site and tried, unsuccessfully, to provoke those demonstrating for peace. They unashamedly sang songs of celebration for the bombs being dropped on Lebanon.

Ignoring this provocation, the large group opposing war gathered to hear remarks from a representative of the Peace Alliance of Winnipeg, a speaker from the city’s Lebanese community, a member of the Canadian-Palestinian Solidarity Network and a member of Jews for Just Peace - Winnipeg. The rally concluded with a spoken word performance from a youth - a rap he composed depicting in heart wrenching detail the chilling

situation facing Palestinian youth living under occupation.

Members of the Peace Alliance are holding daily vigils and plans are underway for another anti-war rally in the coming weeks.

Modern Communism

Bulletin of the Manitoba Regional Committee
of the Communist Party of Canada
(Marxist-Leninist)

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Produced by volunteer labour